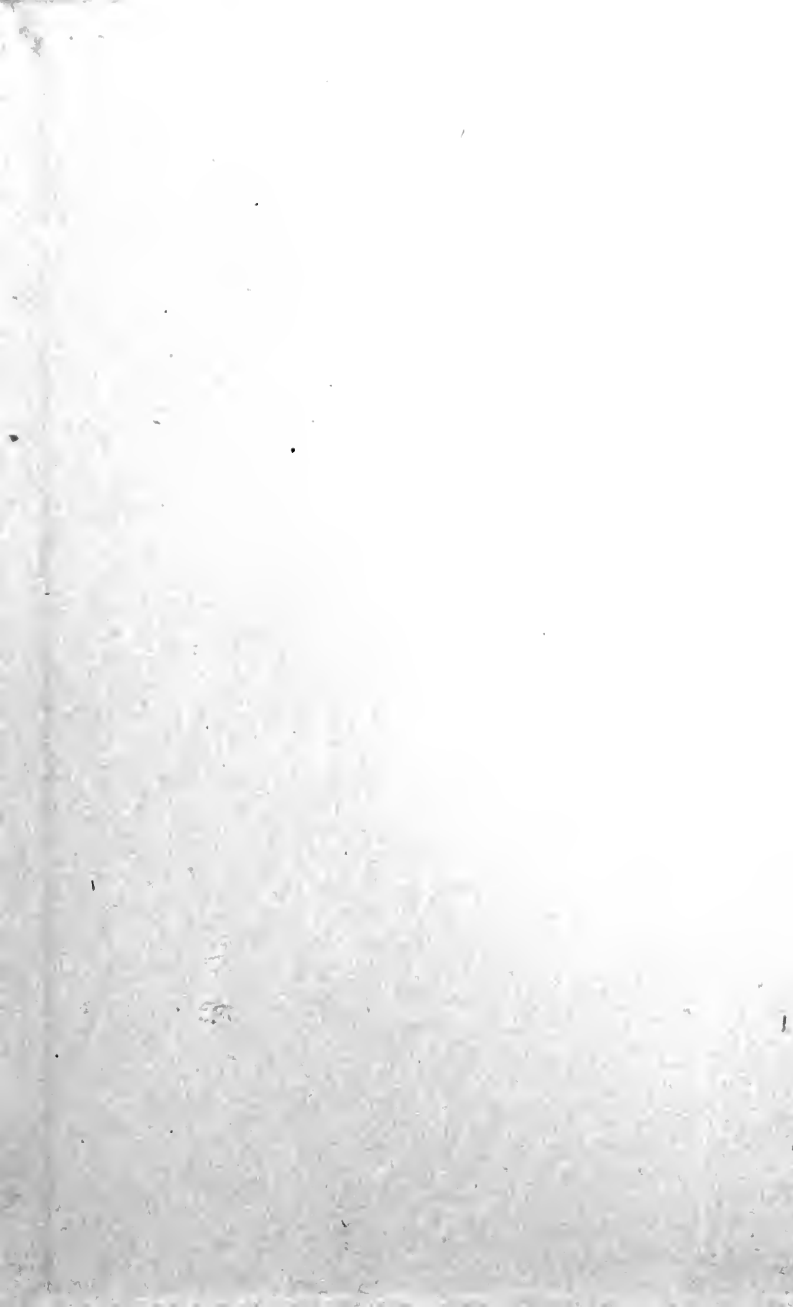


The
HAPPY FOOL
JOHN PALMER



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THE HAPPY FOOL



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BY

JOHN PALMER

AUTHOR OF "THE KING'S MEN,"

"PETER PARAGON,"

ETC.



NEW YORK

HARCOURT, BRACE AND COMPANY

To
ALFRED SUTRO
THIS NOVEL IS
AFFECTIONATELY
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CHAPTER I.

§ I

GUY REVAL and his brother were half-way through breakfast when the letters arrived. Guy sat in a beam of spring sunshine. His hair was abundant, with a tendency to resist the comb. It was not gold, but the sun revealed in it unexpected lights, between red and yellow, which were normally extinguished in a sober brown. His eyes were bright blue. He looked younger than his brother ; but that may only have been because his brother was reading the *Times*.

Theodore Reval was really not more than sixteen months older than Guy, and so far they had kept together. They were contemporaries at Balliol, as they had been contemporaries at school and in the nursery. They had rooms side by side in the Garden Quadrangle. Guy's sitting-room was for meals and pastimes. Theodore's room, on the opposite side of the turret stair, was for reading and writing.

Theodore was of the same middle height as his brother ; he had the same deep-set blue eyes, the same straight brows and wide forehead, the same firm chin and capable mouth. But Theodore was severely moulded. The noses were different. Guy's nose was distinctly a feature that had gone wrong. It just failed of being a snub. Theodore's nose, on

the other hand, was correct, with nothing retrogressive about it. The eyes of the two brothers, though of the same shape and colour, were different in their expression and effect. There was calculation and a steady appreciation of men and things in Theodore's eyes. His brother's eyes hovered and rambled, and kindled upon the least provocation.

The letters arrived and Theodore opened an envelope. A cheque fluttered to the table.

"Aunt Helen," he announced, "sends me a cheque for £25. To-day, of course, is her birthday. We ought to have remembered."

"Do I come into this?" Guy asked.

He picked out his letters from among the breakfast, threw some bills into a basin, and lit upon an envelope addressed in a neat Victorian hand. He broke it open, discovered a cheque, and read :

Fern Cottage,

Hampstead,

July 15th, 19—

Dearest Guy,

You have doubtless forgotten that to-morrow is my birthday, but I am sure you will like to celebrate it. I am sending you a cheque for £25. Do not get into more mischief than you can help.

Yours affectionately,

AUNT HELEN.

Guy put the letter into one pocket and the cheque into another.

"Theodore," he said, "why didn't you remind me about Aunt Helen's birthday? You always remember birthdays."

"I remembered it two days ago," said Theodore, pettishly. "Then I began to think about my speech at the Union."

"I wonder why you think about your speeches at the Union?" said Guy.

"What are we going to do about it?" he added.

"I," said Theodore, "shall buy Max Muller's edition of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*."

"There's rosemary," said Guy. "That's for remembrance."

"Also," Theodore pursued, "I shall pay my tailor. I owe him £18 10s. 11d. The balance will pay for a small celebration. That will be tomorrow, because to-night I am speaking at the Union."

"I don't think I shall pay my tailor," said Guy. "£25 would not be enough. Nor shall I buy Max Muller's edition of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. I shall be able to borrow yours. On the other hand, I shall celebrate Aunt Helen's birthday. No aunt was ever so celebrated."

"You are not going to 'blue' £25?" Theodore protested.

"Stokes," said Guy, "will out-dare Nokes in azure feats. I suggest that you drop the Union. I don't think Aunt Helen will like to have her birthday celebrated the day after."

"I can't drop the Union," said Theodore decisively. "The Junior Conservative Whip will be there. I must make an impression."

§ 2

It was eleven o'clock when Theodore returned that night to Balliol. His speech at the Union had been a great success, and he had added some effective impromptus. The Junior Whip had congratulated him upon his performance, and had enquired into his plans for the future.

Public speaking was for Theodore a characteristic dissipation. His ideas never flowed so freely, he never so nearly attained the felicity of creation, as when he was communicating his thoughts and sentiments to an audience. The sense that his public was with him carried him further than he ever dared to go in moments that were private and cool.

He entered Balliol still warm with the applause and laughter of his partisans, and enjoying that complete sense of well-being which comes from exercising congenial powers to their full capacity and perhaps a little beyond.

Theodore's thoughts in success turned naturally to Guy. He was always anxious to win his brother's approval. Guy had little respect for the successes which were young ambition's ladder.

Theodore, on the other hand, was proud of his ability to meet the world as a practical man, to hold his own upon committees, and to make a good impression on men of a notable influence. He wanted to be confirmed in his pride.

His thoughts were deflected as he picked his way under the trees towards his turret in the Garden Quadrangle by a sudden uproar in his brother's

room. There was a tinkling of broken glass and a fierce scuffling as he walked across the landing.

On opening the door he experienced all the melancholy of a newcomer into an orgy for which he is unprepared. He noted with the pitiless accuracy of a sober man that Guy and his friends were in various and characteristic stages of intoxication. There had apparently been an incident. Arthur Powicke, Guy's principal companion on such occasions, was forcibly restraining a friend from trying to hit another friend with the poker. The man with the poker was pleading hard in a numerous grasp.

"Just one li'l tap, there's a good fellow. Just one li'l tap," he begged.

Guy's voice now became audible. His hair was ruffled; his blue eyes were bright; and his countenance ensanguined.

"I'll tell you what," he said with conviction, "this is a most unfort'nate occurrence. This is r-really-and-truly an affair of honour. That's what it is, r-really-and-truly."

Theodore stood for awhile unnoticed on the threshold of his brother's room. After a few moments he closed the door and slipped away into his own room on the opposite side of the landing. He had returned to Balliol too late for the occasion. He disliked the smell of alcohol; the waste products of a varied dessert scattered upon the chairs, the tables and the floor of his brother's room displeased him; the sideboard with its empty bottles offended his sense of thrift. He shut his door on the noise of Guy's party, switched on the light,

and opened his new edition of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*.

The noise in his brother's room culminated in a typhoon upon the landing. A horde of ruffians clattered down the turret stairs and affronted the serenity of the garden quadrangle. Theodore gathered from sounds which came from the open window that the affair of honour was being settled by means of a mock encounter between the protagonists under the maple tree.

When these proceedings were terminated, Guy and his friends continued the evening's work elsewhere.

Some hours later a hush fell upon Balliol, and Guy walked back to his rooms convinced that he had spent the evening well. The birds were already stirring, and the sky pallidly apprehended the dawn.

Guy performed a florid roulade which landed him at his bedroom. He paused a moment in the corridor. Something told him that Theodore was still awake. He walked along the passage and flung open his brother's door. Theodore looked up quietly from his armchair, removed a tranquil pipe from his mouth and closed his book.

"Well, Guy," he inquired, "is it finished?"

"It is finished," said Guy.

"And you found it really amusing?" stated his brother, in the voice of one suggesting a doubt.

A frown, as of a child whose best ideas have been received without respect, clouded Guy's face for a moment. Then he brightened, and said hopefully:

"At least Aunt Helen will be pleased. Thoroughly adequate celebration."

He turned to leave the room, but stopped a moment at the door :

“ How did you get on to-night at the Union ? ”

“ It was a great success,” said Theodore.

“ Good news,” said Guy.

He hovered a moment at the door as though the occasion called for further comment. He wanted to be cordial. Theodore waited eagerly for the appreciation which he felt was due, disguising his need for warm words under a smiling contemplation of Guy's embarrassment ; but Guy, who only saw the smile, turned abruptly away and went into his bedroom.

CHAPTER II

§ I

GUY'S bedroom looked out of Balliol Tower on to a broad Oxford thoroughfare where there was a cab rank. At this hour of the morning there was only one cab. It was a hansom. The horse stood droopingly, his head in an empty nosebag and his loins covered with a blanket. The cabman was asleep in the shelter.

Guy crossed the room, looked into the street and stretched himself. He had no disposition to go to bed. It seemed a pity to collapse in slumber. His brain was pleasantly alert and clear.

"This," he said, in a sudden burst of intuition, "was how the Romans felt when they carried off the Sabines. Unfortunately," he added with a slight decline of spirits, "no Sabines."

"No Sabines," he repeated with an air of finality.

His gaze rested a moment on the solitary horse outside. He was struck with the dejected aspect of the creature.

"Animal seems depressed," he remarked. The horse lifted a forefoot and stamped. His harness jingled and subsided into silence.

"Wants to go for a walk," said Guy.

The horse lifted his forefoot and stamped again.

"He's getting emphatic," said Guy.

At this point his face gradually illumined with an idea. He examined the window carefully, removed the iron bar, concerning which confidences had been exchanged between several successive tenants of these particular rooms, and measured the distance to the ground with his eye. Two sheets knotted sufficed for the purpose, and in a few moments Guy stood on the pavement.

He looked into the cab shelter and ascertained that the cabman was still asleep. Then, after the necessary preparations had been made, he surmounted the cab and drove off into the town.

§ 2

Several hours later, in a lonely country road some miles from Oxford, a girl from one of the outlying farms was brought to a standstill by the incongruous spectacle of a hansom cab reaching across the highway at an angle of 45 degrees. The horse was tranquilly cropping the wayside grass; the driver, who seemed to the girl marvellously above his occupation, was asleep with his head comfortably pillowed on the roof of the cab. The whole equipage had an absurdly derelict appearance, more especially as the driver was without a hat.

The girl considered the matter for a moment. She did not like to leave things as they were. Cabs should not sprawl unhampered across the King's highway. She decided to wake the driver. She put down her basket and diffidently approached the side of the cab. The gentleman was

very soundly asleep. She pushed him gently in the leg and told him to wake up. As he gave no sign of life, she raised her voice and pushed him a little harder. Still he did not move. Then she put her foot on the step of the cab and raised herself to the level of the roof. She could now shake the gentleman by the arm. He muttered and turned his face a little so that she would be looking straight into his eyes if they had been open.

She had never studied a face so closely before. Her first impression was one of amusement. What a funny thing a face was, with all its dents and creases and holes and corners and little hairs. She drew away a little in order to see this face as a whole which was so funny in detail. Henceforth the gentleman, so far as she was concerned, was the handsome gentleman. She liked his mouth, which was kind, and would probably smile at her when he woke. She liked his clear warm skin and the way in which he slept with his mouth shut. Her father slept with his mouth open, and the young man who was taking her for walks on Sunday snored when he rested in her lap.

She was beginning to wonder what his eyes were like, when he started muttering quite distinctly, but without opening his eyes :

“ Unfort’n’tely no Sabines.”

The gentleman was talking in his sleep. Her embarrassment increased. He might say something which she ought not to hear.

She shook him roughly by the arm.

“ Wake up, sir,” she called.

§ 3

Guy opened his eyes. He found he was looking straight into the face of a girl. She had on a shapeless straw hat, a cotton blouse and a frayed skirt of blue serge, but Guy saw only her face. She was a dark girl with hazel eyes and brown-black hair. Her complexion was pale, but radiantly clear. Her mouth was full and nicely moulded ; but it opened easily and had been partly re-shaped by a constant habit of biting the upper lip.

Guy remained still for a moment. By all the laws of life this should be a vision.

He put out his hand and touched her. She did not move, and Guy removed his hand. He put his elbows on the roof of the cab and contemplated her for a moment. Then suddenly his face broke into a vivid smile. (Had she not divined that he would smile ?)

"Sabina," he said, and his eyes lit.

"I beg your pardon, sir."

There was something in his amusement which she did not like.

"Sabina," he repeated, accusing her with his forefinger.

"No, sir, that isn't my name."

"Do you mind if I call you Sabina ? "

"Why should you ? "

"It means," Guy explained, "that this cab is a chariot, and that I am going to carry you off to the City of the Seven Hills."

The girl began to think that the gentleman was mad. She moved uneasily on the step of the cab. Her position was not very secure. She lost her

balance, and before Guy could recover her, slipped and fell to the ground.

Guy scrambled quickly down from his seat.

"Are you hurt," he enquired anxiously. "I'm most tremendously sorry."

The girl was not hurt; but she had sprawled rather ungracefully in the road, which was still wet with dew.

"Leave me alone," she snapped, "I'm quite all right, thank you."

Guy exhibited concern.

"Please let me help," he begged. "It was all my fault. I'm afraid I was trying to be humorous."

He tried to help her, but she shook him away, and, scrambling angrily to her feet, walked towards her basket.

Temper had made havoc of her prettiness.

Guy was disposed to let her go when he recovered his first impression of her as he had opened his eyes and seen the sun slanting upon her over the roof of the cab. He decided that he could not part with her so easily.

"Sabina," he called.

The strange name hardened her. She had nearly reached the basket. Guy walked rapidly across to her and stood in the way.

"It was kind of you to wake me," he said, "and I'm sorry I frightened you."

He was so anxious to make amends that the girl now wanted to surrender.

"I thought you were mad," she hazarded by way of conciliation.

"Let me dust you," said Guy.

He produced a handkerchief too fine for the purpose and diligently dusted. The girl looked down at him, not without kindness. She had never been treated so gallantly. She was inclined to think that the gentleman ought not to be attending upon her in this way. She had a further opportunity for observing her new acquaintance as he stooped. She admired the set of his head. Guy looked up suddenly and their eyes met. His look was so direct that he seemed almost to know what was in her mind, and she flushed a little.

"Mayn't I call you Sabina?" he asked.

He asked this question as though he had not asked it before, and as though the request was entirely right and proper.

"Do as you please about it," said the girl.

Guy finished his brushing, and there was a short silence. Guy did not wish to appear victorious, and the girl did not want to say anything to emphasise her submission. There was an absurd sense between them that something of importance had occurred. It was Guy who spoke first.

"What is in the basket?" he asked.

"Butter and eggs. We keep cows now, and the butter goes to Oxford every Thursday."

"I will drive you in," said Guy. "That is the least I can do."

"Oh, sir, but I couldn't."

"And you mustn't call me sir."

"I cannot very well call you anything else, can I?"

"Guy is my name, if you would really like to know."

She opened her eyes at him in a way which in another might have been coquetry. It was really bewilderment.

"How can I call you by your Christian name?" she asked.

"It's quite easy," said Guy. "Don't they teach you these things at school?"

Sabina's rejoinder was indirect, but sufficient.

"You're a funny one," she remarked.

"I am glad you like my humour," said Guy.

"Usually the only person it amuses is myself."

"I don't think I do like it, really and truly," said Sabina. "At least, I shouldn't like it if——." She stopped in some confusion.

"Well," said Guy.

"You see, a person would not know whether you really meant what you said. A person likes to know whether you mean what you say to her, doesn't she? I mean you don't want to be made fun of when you don't know a person is making fun."

Guy was struck by this.

"Sabina, I believe that explains why I am not half so popular as I might be. Shall I promise you something?"

"You are still making fun," said Sabina, doubtfully.

"Not now," Guy assured her. "Really, I'm not. I promise not to do it."

Guy held out his hand. Mechanically she put out hers, and he held it a moment; time enough

to feel that, though it was rough with labour, the fingers lay softly upon his palm.

She withdrew awkwardly, and Guy breezily covered their confusion.

"About this basket," he said. "You must let me drive you into Oxford. We have been talking here for years, and you'll be late for market. I shall have to carry you off in the chariot after all."

"You promised not to make fun," said Sabina.

"I am not making fun, Sabina."

"Then why do you talk about carrying me off, and why do you call me Sabina?"

"Sabina is not a joke," said Guy.

He reflected a moment and had slight misgivings.

"At least," he added, "it is not altogether a joke."

He began to explain. He realised, as soon as he had begun, that it would not be easy. He sat down on the bank beside the road, and invited Sabina to sit beside him. She sat a little distantly, and fidgeted with the grasses.

"There were some people called Romans," Guy ventured.

"I know, like Julius Caesar."

"Yes," said Guy, "like Julius Caesar."

"One day they realised that there were not enough wives to go round."

Sabina now looked at him with interest.

"And so," Guy continued (he was now somewhat alarmed by the approaching climax), "one day they started in chariots."

"I once saw a picture of a chariot," interrupted Sabina. "It was not a bit like a hansom cab."

"Not altogether," Guy admitted. "Well the Romans started in chariots, and carried off the women of the next parish."

"Was one of them called Sabina," she asked.

"They were all of them called Sabina."

The girl was plucking at the grass on the bank. She coloured slightly.

"I see," she said at last.

There was a slight pause.

She looked at him nervously, and then away again. "Did the women in your story want to be carried off?" she asked.

Guy hesitated, and turned upon her with a sudden smile.

"You promised to tell me the truth," she reminded him.

"Well, then," said Guy, "I am afraid that, at the time, they had objections. In fact," he admitted, in a burst of confidence, "they were taken by force. But they afterwards settled down quite comfortably with their husbands, and they all had families which conquered the whole world. Your friend Julius Caesar, for instance."

Sabina rose from the bank with some dignity.

"I think your story is perfectly horrid," she said, "and I shall walk to Oxford."

"You will be very late," said Guy.

Sabina, half way to the basket, stopped. "What time is it now?" she asked.

"It is nearly 7 o'clock."

He was surprised to see a look of considerable alarm come over her face. She seemed undecided what to do.

"My father will be angry," she said at last.

"Are you afraid of your father?" Guy asked.

Sabina again found in his voice the concern which had before prevailed with her.

"Father is awfully strict," she said.

"You must let me drive you," said Guy, peremptorily.

"How far is it?" he asked.

"About six miles."

"Then I can get you there by 8 o'clock."

Sabina gave way. She allowed Guy to help her into the cab. He handed her the basket and shut the doors. She leaned over the edge of the sill.

"You mustn't drive me right into Oxford," she protested. "Someone might see us. You will please put me down by the railway bridge. I'll walk the rest."

Guy climbed into his seat; whipped up the horse; and, in a few minutes, they were trotting pleasantly along. The sun was beginning to warm the air. The dew sparkled in the road. The horse's hoofs rang crisply on the ground, and the harness jingled merrily. Guy felt an extraordinary exhilaration in thinking of the girl who had thus strangely become his fare. He opened the trap in the roof and looked down on her. She was lying back, happily enjoying her drive. She was keeping close watch upon the road to see whether there was anybody who might observe her, but apprehension gave rather a zest to her pleasure. After a while she seemed to feel that Guy was looking at her. She glanced up and saw his face smiling at her through the trap.

"Well, Sabina," he said, "how do you like it?"

"I love riding," she answered.

He shut the trap, but in a moment or so opened it again.

"I say," he called, "this old hansom cab is rather like a chariot after all, what?"

He shut the trap with a snap before she could reply, but he had time to see that he had not vexed her.

§ 4

At the railway bridge, about a mile out of Oxford, Guy helped Sabina out of the cab and set her on the road.

She said good-bye, and waited for him to climb to his seat again; but Guy lingered.

"I don't know where you live," he said at last.

"I live at Manygates Farm, not far from where you met me. But you mustn't come to look for me."

Guy smiled in a way that committed him to nothing.

"Please, you mustn't come," she repeated.

She seemed terrified at the idea of his coming, and Guy wondered whether she had her father in mind.

"I won't come," he said, "if you'll meet me where you found me to-day. I'll be there on Thursday evening next at half-past eight."

"Oh, but I mustn't," she said. But she said it without conviction.

"I shall be there, in any case," said Guy.

He wanted to touch her in some way as he said

good-bye, but he could not bring himself to do so. He climbed into the cab and took the reins. As he was starting off she smiled up at him unexpectedly.

"Those women were carried off by force, weren't they," she said. "That wasn't quite like you and me, was it?"

"Not a bit like you and me," responded Guy; "but I shall call you Sabina, all the same."

He whipped up the horse and drove towards Oxford.

Once or twice he looked back and saw Sabina trudging after the cab with her basket. She was very slight, fragile and appealing. The last time he looked he raised the whip and waved to her. She waved her hand back at him in answer.

CHAPTER III

§ I

IT took Guy some time to persuade the cabman that he had not been grievously wronged. Guy explained that he had wanted the cab to visit a sick relative in the night, and that it had seemed a shame to wake the cabman when he was obviously enjoying his rest. The cabman enquired what price his feelings when he woke and found the cab was gone. The cabman's vocabulary was limited, but he had no objection to repeating certain words continually. Guy reflected that thus Aaron might have spoken when he desired to turn the waters into blood. Fortunately, Guy was at last able to discover a neglected sovereign in one of his pockets.

The cabman accepted the sovereign as though in absence of mind, and was gradually brought to believe that Guy had acted for the best. He even began to see humour in the affair when, looking into the cab to assure himself that the fittings were intact, he found a comb such as ladies use for fastening their back hair. Then he smiled. It was the touch of nature.

He handed the comb to Guy quite pleasantly.

"I'd make it two sovereigns if I could," said Guy. "Unfortunately I'm broke."

The cabman put a finger to his lip.

"You may rely on me, sir," he said.

"No harm in it," Guy assured him.

"I ain't the man to see harm in it," said the cabman. "You can rely on me, sir. Any time and every time. All I ask is that, next time your relative is took sick, you will kindly leave a note to that effect in the shelter. Otherwise I keep wonderin'."

Guy's absence from Balliol had not been noted by the authorities. Powicke had seen the knotted sheets depending from Guy's window as he leaned out of the room above, cooling his fevers in the morning air. He had retrieved the evidence, thus saving his friend from inconvenient enquiries. The college porter remarked as Guy passed into college that he had not seen him pass out that morning. Guy condoled with him on the gradual decay of his faculties.

§ 2

As the week advanced Guy found himself thinking a good deal of Sabina and of her apparition in the sunlight. He did not, however, realise how greatly he was looking forward to seeing her again until two days later a letter arrived from Marian.

Marian was his distant cousin and an adopted niece of Aunt Helen. Her letter to Guy was as follows :—

Fern Cottage,

Hampstead,

Dear Guy,

The Duke has surprised us all. He proposes to come to Oxford, presumably to see his two sons. He will be at our disposal on Thursday next. The Duke is going

to disburse. So please see that Theodore engages some costly rooms. What is the name of that jolly old hotel where we had lunch last summer? (It had something to do with a bishop, but it was not the crozier.)

I'm most excited at the prospect of seeing you so soon. It seems an age since you went up on Friday, three weeks ago.

Yours,

"A little more than kin, and less than kind,"

MARIAN.

P.S.—What on earth does Hamlet mean by that?

Guy was at first delighted that Marian was coming to Oxford. Then he remembered that on Thursday evening he was to meet Sabina. He began to wonder which was the more pressing engagement.

He began to be angry with himself, because he feared in advance that he was going to neglect Marian. He was angry also with Marian for writing so nicely about their meeting (she even quoted Hamlet to please him, knowing that he always rose to Shakespeare like a fish to a fly). He was most of all angry with the Duke for choosing Thursday.

Guy and Theodore had agreed with Marian that their father should be called the Duke, one evening when they had been reading Browning's *Last Duchess*. The Duke was a mystery to the children of his first marriage, not because he was at all subtle or difficult to understand, but because they could not even now believe that he was as selfish as he seemed, or that he really disliked them. And

yet his dislike was natural enough. His sons had for some years been a source of expense to him and a domestic embarrassment. Moreover, they reminded him of his first wife, who had died when she had found him out.

Guy and Theodore had provided for themselves.

It was not owing to the Duke, and it was in spite of his second Duchess, that they were now at Balliol. It was due partly to Aunt Helen, who was their mother's sister and had provided some of the means, and to their habit of acquiring scholarships and exhibitions. Theodore worked for them and Guy picked them up.

§ 3

Guy was pacing his room in considerable disturbance of mind when Theodore came to him, waving a letter in the air, with an excitement more usual in his brother than in himself. He too had received news from Marian.

"Guy," he exclaimed, "they are coming to Oxford on Thursday—Aunt Helen, the Duke and Marian."

"I know," said Guy, without elation. He thrust his hands into his pockets and looked moodily out of the window.

Theodore was too excited to notice his brother's manner.

"We must get ready, Guy," he said. "I suppose it will have to be the Mitre. Marian likes the Mitre."

"I wonder," said Guy, "whether we could put them off."

Theodore stared at his brother in astonishment.

"Thursday is Union night," said Guy evasively.

"I would drop the Union for Marian any night in the year," said Theodore.

Guy looked at his brother.

"You must be unusually fond of Marian," he said, after a pause.

Theodore coloured slightly.

"Aren't we all unusually fond of Marian?" he responded.

Theodore engaged rooms at the Mitre and even rose to special instructions for the dinner. He returned to Balliol suffering from the uneasy excitement of a careful man who for once in a way has been 'lavish. To justify himself he took Marian's letter from his pocket and read it again. It was not at all the kind of letter Guy had received. They would arrive by the 10.30 from Paddington, and she hoped the weather would be nice. It was the sort of letter a girl writes when she desires to be kind to someone without feeling greatly excited about it.

§ 4

Theodore was emphatic in praise of a flawless occasion as he paced the platform of Oxford station with his brother, waiting for the down express.

Nor could Guy for long concern himself with his dilemma. His spirits rose like a bubble in the sun. After all, both Sabina and Marian were a part of this agreeable world of warm air and blue sky. Why should he greatly worry concerning a choice between two pleasures?

Theodore joyously indicated the approaching train, and, when the passengers had sorted themselves out, Aunt Helen was descried bearing down upon them with Marian and the Duke in attendance.

"Theodore," said Aunt Helen, as she came within reach of him, "aren't you going to kiss your Aunt?"

"It isn't done," said Theodore, gaily, "not on this platform."

But by this time Guy had already saluted her.

Marian came into the circle. She was tall, with light brown hair, a warm complexion and steady grey eyes.

Guy received her as a man receives his best friend. Theodore was less familiar, but you did not gather that he was less intimately concerned.

They drove in cabs from the station to the Mitre. Guy and Marian somehow got into the same hansom and the rest followed in a four-wheeler.

In the hansom Marian turned to Guy, her eyes shining with pleasure.

"Well," she asked, "what are you going to do with us?"

"River," said Guy, who never wasted words with Marian.

"Of course," Marian responded, "but please fill in the picture."

"Luncheon-baskets from Buol's," said Guy. "Don't look out of the cab, or you might see Oxford. From the Mitre we proceed to the river. You will admire the Broad-walk and identify the barges. Up the Char to Mesopotamia and beyond. Cosy corner. 'Places of nestling green for poets

made.' Champagne, lobster, mayonnaise, rook-pie and salad. Cold cherry tart and cream. Duke greatly impressed, and wondering what it is going to cost; also whether we do this sort of thing every day."

"The Duke is going to pay for everything," said Marian, with a twinkle.

"He shall do nothing of the kind," said Guy. He added, with a broad smile, "We're going to pay for the Duke in consideration of all he's done for us."

Guy spoke of his father without bitterness. His father was odd, penurious and hard, but Guy was quite disposed to be dutiful. He supposed vaguely that he did not very well suit his father, but, after all, why shouldn't the Duke save his money or spend it on the wife of his indian summer?

"High Street," said Guy as the cab swung round at Carfax. "Possibly the best street in all the world," he added complacently.

§ 5

Marian, on the river, was conscious of nothing except that the boys were good to her, and that Guy was there. She ate and drank indifferently of what was offered, spilling over with laughter and with the fugitive, allusive fun which runs in families and is mysterious to outsiders. It seemed as though they had been on the water for not quite an hour when Guy announced that it was almost time for tea.

They left the punt and walked across Mesopotamia towards Balliol. Keble was indicated and

the Duke was observed to prick up a rationalistic ear. He associated Keble with incense and certain cardinals.

"So that's Keble?" he said. "It looks much less mediæval than I expected."

"I don't know much about Keble," said Guy. "I believe it has been a good deal restored."

"Ought to have been pulled down at the Reformation," said the Duke with conviction.

It was not till they were having tea that Guy again began to feel uneasy about his appointment with Sabina. The moment was approaching when he must either stay beside Marian in the theatre or desert her on a motor-bicycle for Manygates Farm. Why hadn't he written to Sabina and fixed another day? Why did he always drift into painful problems?

"Everything is perfect to-day," said Marian suddenly. "I hope nothing will happen to spoil it all."

"Why should anything happen?" asked Theodore.

"I am always afraid of something happening when I am enjoying myself," said Marian.

"That's what comes of a classical education," grumbled Guy. "Call no man happy till he's dead, and then he doesn't know he's well off. Greek cheerfulness has been overrated."

Inwardly he was saying: "I must certainly stay with Marian."

Aunt Helen and Marian were taken to the Mitre after tea. They were to dine at 7 o'clock and afterwards to go on to the theatre.

§ 6

Guy was still dressing when Theodore came into his room. Under his quiet manner there was an unusual intensity.

"Well, Guy," he said, lighting a cigarette and watching Guy's efforts with a black tie, "I think she's enjoying herself immensely."

"You seem to be taking this small expedition very seriously," said Guy. "You're like a Master of the Revels arranging a suitable presentation. Confound this beastly tie!" he concluded suddenly.

"The colour's wrong," said Theodore, who was in full dress with a champagne-coloured waistcoat. He took up the whitest of a bundle of white ties from the table and tied it round his brother's neck.

"Why this sudden passion for dressing-up?" Guy asked. "We shall look like the Royal Box."

As he spoke he suddenly saw himself, presumably on his motor-bicycle, in tails and a white tie.

"But not a white waistcoat," he suddenly reflected, "because, as usual, they're all deficient."

"And now," said Theodore, surveying his work with interest, "we must fit you up with a vest."

He inspected Guy's wardrobe and produced three or four white waistcoats. They had none of them been worn; they had simply mouldered.

"I've got you there," Guy grinned.

"Not so fast," said Theodore, with a grin almost as broad as his brother's (to-day he was almost a boy). "I also have a wardrobe."

"Which is doubtless immaculate," said Guy.

Theodore clad his brother in light mauve, and put coral studs into his shirt-front.

"And now for the fancy-dress ball," said Guy, with a bitter feeling that he had somehow been prepared for sacrifice.

"Come along," said Theodore briefly. "Marian will be down before we arrive if you're not careful."

They passed a friend in the porch.

"I don't know how you feel about it," said Guy, as they walked arm-in-arm down Turl Street; "but when that fellow looked at me just now I felt as if I were naked."

"But not ashamed," said Theodore gaily. Guy looked at his brother, surprised into a sudden affection, and squeezed his arm.

"What's happened to you?" he said. "You're behaving as though it were April."

§ 7

Guy was surprised on seeing Marian. Since she had been to Newnham the brothers had not seen very much of her. They had walked together and played family hockey together. They had spent a wild holiday in Scotland together, with Aunt Helen in the background. But they had not seen her on any social occasion since her hair had gone up and her dresses had come down. To-night she was in pale-blue silk, a present from Aunt Helen.

Aunt Helen had dressed her for Guy. But Theodore was the victim. Theodore stood like a man who had seen the heavens open.

Guy said:

"What's the matter with Marian?"

"We haven't seen her really grown-up before," said Theodore.

"Throws quite a new light on the subject," said Guy, admiring her as a critic might admire an Old Master.

"Inclines to Rubens rather than Burne Jones," he continued. "Marian, as the poet Ibsen would say, you're filling out."

Theodore looked rather like a snail whose horns have been touched, and a shadow fell upon Marian.

"Guy," said Aunt Helen, rather like a great lady, "it's time you gave up talking to Marian like a schoolboy."

During dinner Guy was alternately boisterous and pre-occupied. He had opportunities to tell Marian that he had an appointment, but it had somehow become very difficult to do so.

Too soon, as it seemed, they were at the theatre, watching the first act of an entertaining comedy. Though his intention wavered under arguments alternately suggested by conscience and inclination, there was something curiously inevitable in the way his intention to find Sabina survived.

He looked at his watch as the curtain fell on the first act. It was already half-past eight. Sabina might even now be waiting. It became impossible for him to sit. He muttered something about a cigarette, and went out into the street.

The town band was playing at the corner. Young men and girls were standing about or promenading in all stages of familiarity. He was vividly aware of the passing of the time, and had a sudden dismay as he realised that he would, in any case, be late.

But it would be mean to leave the theatre without a word to Marian. He must return simply to say at once that he was going.

Marian turned brightly to him as he entered.

"Marian," he said, "this is a dismal show."

Marian looked at him in astonishment.

"It isn't Shakespeare, of course, but it's good enough," she protested.

Her tone implied that anything to-night was good enough. Guy looked away.

"I've got an appointment," he said.

Marian's eyes wandered over him in surprise.

"Isn't this rather sudden?" she asked.

"The fact is," said Guy, "I'm rather tied up. I'm asking you to let me off for an hour or so, that is all. I had half a mind to cut it out—my appointment, I mean——" He broke lamely off, and there was a painful silence.

Marian's pleasure was destroyed, but she showed no sign.

"You'd better go," she said.

Theodore perceived that something was wrong.

"What's all this about?" he said, leaning towards them.

"Nothing," said Marian. "Guy's taken a sudden dislike to the play. He's leaving us for an hour."

"I've seen worse," said Theodore, cheerfully. "What does the fellow mean?"

He challenged his brother with a false cheerfulness.

Theodore's antagonism only made it easier for

Guy to go. It enabled him to think that he was quarrelling with his brother.

"See you at supper, Theo," he said.

"You're really going?"

"It seems Guy has a previous engagement," put in Marian.

Guy's last look was at Theodore.

§ 8

He ran for his bicycle and in a few moments was racing along the road towards Abingdon. The clock in Tom Tower struck a quarter to nine as he passed.

The striking of the clock and his rapid motion towards Sabina quickly obliterated the scene in the theatre. He was soon wondering whether he should be in time, and shortly the whole of his mind was set upon that question. He pictured Sabina coming to the bend of the road, waiting a few moments, and then turning to go away, with that settled look of offence which had set him so sharply towards her at their first meeting. Why hadn't he started before? What had possessed him to make so much of leaving the theatre party? Marian had had dozens of theatre parties before, or, at any rate, she should have dozens of theatre-parties henceforth. He decided he would take her out to something really good in the summer vacation. They would dine somewhere amusing, and they would have supper afterwards, too, and a hansom-cab all the way to Hampstead.

A hansom-cab! He had met Sabina in a hansom-cab. How pretty she had looked, with her

head back among the faded upholstery of the interior.

"I couldn't help it, could I?" he asked himself, as he joyously realised that his bicycle would take the intervening hill at top speed. "I had to see her again."

"Marian should have come on some other day," he added, a moment later.

At this point he swung round a bend of the road which seemed familiar to him. Sabina was sitting on the bank, apparently looking in his direction.

CHAPTER IV

§ I

SABINA had wavered a good deal on the subject of keeping her appointment. Often she could hardly believe that her adventure with the hansom cab had really happened. It seemed, on looking back, in no case to be taken seriously. Most likely the gentleman had already forgotten her. Yet he had seemed really anxious to please her and to win her confidence. She liked to recall how he had dusted her with his handkerchief.

He had also told her that story about the women who had been carried off—a story which excited her pleasantly. And he had carried her off himself.

He must be rather a wild young man. She had heard stories of the wild young men who lived in the colleges. Her father had warned her that of all young men they were the least to be trusted.

Sabina was irretrievably afraid of her father. His views of life were determined by a Methodist upbringing and the elopement of his wife with a friendly neighbour some years ago. Sabina had to account to him for all her time. He read terrible passages from the Old Testament every evening to her and to her younger sister.

But, though she feared her father, and partly because she feared him, Sabina's mind naturally turned to the things he so insistently forbade.

The boys who addressed her as she went about her business on the farm had for her a special interest as being accursed in her father's book. She was filled with urgent curiosities about life before she had really passed out of childhood. She was now in her nineteenth year. She had walked hand in hand with youths on the neighbouring farms in a condition of excitement, but her excitement was mainly fear that she might be caught by her father. The youths counted for little in her emotions, and she evaded their familiarity. Their clumsy love-making annoyed her. And now there came a wild young gentleman into her life (almost certainly from one of the colleges) who had the ways of another world—a wild young gentleman who had apologised to her, dusted her with his pocket handkerchief, driven her to market and yet entirely abstained from the familiarities to which she was accustomed. He had merely talked to her in an oddly exciting way.

Hitherto the life of Sabina, apart from her laborious days on a small poor farm, had been one long effort to escape.

She had been accustomed to escape to her room, where, with the door locked, she would put on finery secretly purchased in the town. One day her father surprised her, and, when he saw what she was about, scattered the contents of her box on the floor and burnt them.

For a time she had sought an escape in companionship with her younger sister, and for a while they were inseparable. But Sabina's sister was her father's child, meek and cool and demure, and

easily frightened by any suspicion of revolt against the strict discipline of their existence. Her elder sister's speculations about life, her fugitive indulgence in meaningless gallantries, and her bold mockeries of their father's faith, alarmed and distressed the younger girl, who one day was discovered by her father in tears. Sabina had to endure another terrible scene in which she was accused of trying to corrupt her sister. She was told that it would be better that a millstone should be tied about her neck.

Sabina was even denied an escape into religion. For some time she had attended chapel, and had enjoyed herself passionately in the chanting of hymns and the declaiming of psalms. The psalms especially pleased her with their oriental savagery and pictorial wealth. Her father began to be pleased with her. They read the Bible together, and it seemed that her original fear of him was at last to pass into an understanding. They came emotionally into touch for the first time. The old man began to feel a tenderness for his daughter apart from his tenderness of the elder for a lost sheep on the mountains. Then one fatal day Sabina wandered into a strange place of worship where a wonderful pageant was in progress. The church was full of sweet vapour. There was a tinkle of bells, and a congregation with bowed heads who curtsied to a dim Presence throned amid lights half extinguished in a blue haze, and signed themselves mysteriously upon the breast. After this experience her father's chapel seemed cold and mean, and she visited again this other place which seemed

a temple fit for God. Then her father came to hear of it, and added the wrath of a flouted sectary to the chastisement of a parent who must, if possible, save his child from the Devil.

"Ye'd make a luxury even of your religion," he had said.

And now she was seeking an escape in the admiration of village boys. She had allowed one of them, George Dudesney, a young labourer at Manygates, to give her a ring which she wore round her neck under her blouse. She rarely associated the ring with the tolerated youth who had bestowed it; but she liked to finger it in secret defiance of her father in the dreary farm kitchen.

§ 2

On the day of her appointment with Guy, though she had not yet consciously decided to meet him, she hurried through her work in an excitement which caused her breath to come suddenly in little sighs. If she were really to go after all, she would have somehow to explain her absence. Unexpectedly, however, her father played into her hands. The two cows were to be taken, after milking, beyond the road to the water-meadow. She would pass the bend in the road where she had found Guy. She would be early for the appointment, but she could wait.

It was after eight when she took the cows across, but she was back again sitting in the bend of the road by eight-thirty. For nearly half-an-hour she leaned back on the grass, inertly resting. When her thoughts at last began to move they reverted

to the story of the women who had been carried off. The story haunted her, and pleased her, and seemed somehow to be aimed at a secret wish.

She had an agreeable feeling, such as she had not experienced before, that the success of her effort to escape no longer rested with herself. She had tried again and again, and she had failed. Almost she had ceased to struggle. The ring about her neck was the secret rebellion of a defeated child. But where she had failed by herself she might with help succeed. She did not actually put it thus, but half the thought was there.

The clock of the Convent Church, some 200 yards away, broke into her thoughts. The time fixed for the appointment had come, but Perseus had not arrived.

Of course he had not remembered. He had come with his cab on a drunken frolic. He had been kind to her, and he had forgotten all about it. She felt as though a hand held out had suddenly been withdrawn. She would wait a little longer and go back to the farm, and everything would go on as before.

At that moment Sabina came near to realising the significance of her tragedy. She saw herself pitifully as from the outside. Usually she met her disappointments with angry impatience or she impotently acquiesced. But to-night she had risen beyond a momentary vexation. She looked at her life, and was sorry for it. She lay back quietly, her face sideways to the road by which

Perseus should have come, and big tears rolled at intervals down her face.

§ 3

A motor cyclist rushed round the bend of the road, passed her, and then, apparently having some trouble with his engine, stopped. She did not turn to see what he was doing, until suddenly she realised he had left his bicycle in the road and was walking back towards her.

She knew now who it was, but she did not move. She was in the mood not to care how she looked or what anyone might think of her.

Guy could not see her face, but he recognised her at a glance. He called her name, but she took not the slightest notice. He took her by the shoulder and bent over to see why she was so quiet. He found she was crying.

"Sabina," he asked, "what is the matter?"

Still she did not move.

"What is it, Sabina?" he asked again. "Tell me what it is."

She turned to him slowly.

Guy hesitated to think that he was the cause of her tears. Yet, after all, she was here waiting for him, and he was late, and he himself would have been greatly disappointed if he had not seen her.

"Is it," he asked, "because you thought I wasn't coming?"

She shook her head.

"Partly, perhaps," he ventured, "but not altogether?"

He thought she assented to this, but the sound which came from her might have been anything.

Then with that absurd want of grace which so often characterises the gestures of affliction, she crumpled towards him.

"It's everything," she wailed.

Her head missed his chin by a nail's breadth, and fell upon his overalls. The ends of her hair brushed his face. He was tremendously concerned, but he didn't know in the least what to say.

After a while she recovered and drew away from him. She found a handkerchief for her tears.

At last she spoke.

"I'm sorry, sir," she said.

From being one of the afflicted of the earth she had suddenly become a young person apologising for a misdemeanour.

Guy took her by the arm almost angrily.

"You mustn't talk to me like that," he said.

Sabina looked at him a little scared; but offence was also lurking, and Guy's manner softened immediately.

"You mustn't call me 'Sir,' " he hastened to elucidate, "and you mustn't apologise. Hang it all," he exclaimed in a reckless resolve to put the position clearly, "you can't call a fellow 'Sir' when you've just been crying on his chest. My name's Guy," he concluded briefly.

"I can't call you that," protested Sabina.

"Then you can't call me anything. You will have to say 'Hie' to me, or 'You there,' or something like that."

"Now you're making fun."

"Does this look like fun?" he asked. He displayed his patent leather shoes, and, throwing open his overalls, disclosed a blazer covering a mauve waistcoat and a white shirt.

"Fact is," he said, "I've bolted from a party. You expected me to-night?" he asked.

"I was here, wasn't I?" Sabina pointed out.

They were silent a moment. Guy was not happy in the tension of these sudden silences.

"What was really wrong just now?" he asked. "Aren't you happy at home?"

"I'm not exactly enjoying myself," she replied. "Father doesn't like people to enjoy themselves. Once, when I had been out with a fellow——"

She paused in some confusion, and there was a silence.

"Were you keen on this 'fellow'?" Guy asked.

"No."

"Why did you go out with him?"

"I don't know. It was something to do."

Guy began to see a little more clearly into Sabina's life at the farm. They were sitting side by side on the bank. He put his hand on her shoulder, and his finger rested a moment on a ribbon round her neck.

"Have you," he asked, "ever been really keen?"

"Never, not really, as you might say keen."

Guy was abstractedly playing with the ribbon. He hesitated a moment.

"Concerning these fellows——" he began.

"They come round," said Sabina. "Usually they're only silly. But there was one who wouldn't take 'no' for an answer."

"The beast!" she added with a sudden violence.

"Sudden light upon the decorums of English rustic life," commented a familiar imp in Guy, which, even at this solemn moment, was not entirely suppressed.

"I suppose," he said aloud, softly rubbing Sabina's cheek with his finger, "that I'm not behaving particularly well myself at the present moment?"

Sabina leaned her cheek towards his hand.

"You're different," she said.

He was again playing with the piece of ribbon, and Sabina felt the ring she wore round her neck moving under her dress. She felt a sudden wish to tell Guy things about herself.

"That ribbon you're pulling," she began.

"Well," said Guy.

"There's something tied to it," she said. "Pull it and you'll see."

Guy pulled it gently.

"Pull it hard," she instructed.

He gave it a sharp tug, and the ring came up warm from where it had lain.

He held it a moment and then put his cheek to it.

"No," cried Sabina vehemently, "you mustn't do that."

She took the ring away from him, tore it from the ribbon and flung it into the road. It rolled towards the bicycle and lay.

Guy looked at her rather foolishly.

"I wanted to tell you about it," said Sabina. That ring was given to me by a fellow. I don't

know why I wore it. It was nothing to me at all, really."

"Let me give you a ring," said Guy. "I should like you to wear it as you were wearing that one."

"That would be nice," said Sabina.

"The ring was warm, Sabina," said Guy, flushing

"Yes," she said.

She laughed nervously, and Guy wondered whether he ought to kiss her.

The sun had gone down and the road was in shadow between its high banks. The Convent clock struck ten.

"I must go now," said Sabina at last.

"How far is it to your home?"

"Just over the fields."

"Let me come some of the way?"

"You can come to the hedge."

They walked to a stile on the opposite side of the road and passed over the field in silence. They stood a moment under the tall hedge which separated them from the farm windows.

"Good night," said Sabina.

She held out her hand awkwardly.

"Good night," said Guy.

It seemed as if they could neither part nor stay. They waited for one another. Then Sabina impatiently turned to go.

The impatience in her manner loosened Guy's constraint. He stepped towards her.

To a person observing them from the road they were two separate shadows which were suddenly blended into one in the deeper shade of the hedge,

two shadows which remained indistinguishable for nearly a minute.

Guy was saying: "When can I be with you again?"

"I will try to be free on Sunday. Wait for me in the road after dinner in the afternoon."

"I will take you somewhere on my bicycle."

"Let me go now."

"Say good-night again."

After they had separated, a person who was observing them from the road walked to Guy's bicycle and surveyed it for a moment. Then he stooped, picked up Sabina's discarded ring, and put it in his pocket.

CHAPTER V

§ I

GUY, in his dreams of fair women, had hitherto felt only their universal attractiveness. He had now conceived a particular infatuation, and the consequences were not unusual. He desired, as soon as possible, to deepen the experience.

On arriving at Oxford he put up his bicycle, discarded his overalls, and walked to the Mitre to see whether the theatre party had returned. Finding they were not yet due for half an hour, he ordered supper with some idea of making amends for his desertion. The fact that he had been with Sabina did not make him any the less eager to please Marian. On the contrary, he felt an increased capacity for all that life might offer. He was aware of only one drawback, which at one time he would have counted serious. He had no desire whatever for good food.

The party from the theatre arrived, obviously under a cloud. Guy felt the atmosphere, but ignored it.

"Come along, people," he said, "and see what I have done for you. A little soup, *sole frite* chicken and salad, sparkling Saumur."

"So that's why you left us," said Theodore.

Theodore was indecently ready to conspire with his brother to save the situation for Marian.

Marian took up the bill of fare and looked at Guy. The brightness of her manner was metallic.

"Is this the reason, Guy?" she asked, waving the bill.

They stood a little apart from the others. Guy stepped to her and touched her lightly on the arm. "Marian," he said, "it was rude of me. I'm sorry if you minded."

His experience at Manygates had sensitised him in quite a novel way. His awakened feeling for one woman warmed him to the merits of another. This is nature's own paradox, and only life gives it proof.

The supper, when it arrived, was superficially a success. Marian glittered. Guy, with a desperate sense of being in disgrace, was almost boisterous. He had been snubbed by Marian for the first time in his life, just at the moment, too, when he was feeling unaccountably affectionate.

§ 2

The unconfessed emotions of the supper table were afterwards loosened in two scenes. Aunt Helen, going to Marian's room an hour after her retirement, found her lying on the bed with her clothes on. She lay back reading *Diana of the Crossways*. She took Meredith as another girl might take aspirin.

Aunt Helen removed the book.

"What I like about Meredith," said Marian, unabashed, "is that he makes you understand how men can be perfectly beastly and yet be not half so bad after all."

"Don't go round about with me," said Aunt Helen. "You've been very miserable this evening."

"Am I going round about?" said Marian. "I was speaking of men. I suppose the best of them have appointments." She paused a moment. "I wonder whether he kissed her," she added.

"How do you know it was that?"

"What else could it be? I almost hope it was. I shouldn't like Guy to desert me on a day like this to buy a billiard cue. Besides you could see that he was full of it when he came back."

"Full of what?"

"It—Her—Nature—if we must give it a name."

She broke off and shivered a little, looking very bright in the eye.

"And he touched me, Auntie, down there, because he was full of somebody else."

§ 3

The other scene took place earlier somewhere between the Mitre and Balliol porch.

Theodore gripped Guy by the arm, as they rounded the corner into Turl Street.

"You spoiled the day for Marian," he said. "Why on earth did you do it?"

Guy shook off his brother and walked on.

"Was it anything to do with your celebration last week?" Theodore persisted.

"Partly."

They passed into Balliol and crossed to their rooms in silence.

At the door of Guy's bedroom they stopped, and Theodore said :

"Are you making a fool of yourself with some girl?"

"Put it that way if you like," said Guy.

Then he added in exasperation:

"What's all this fuss about? I cut two acts of a bad play, and I was away just over an hour."

Theodore looked at his brother quietly in the dim light of the passage.

"You spoiled Marian's evening," he said.

"You were there, weren't you?" said Guy.

"Surely one of us was enough."

Without another look at his brother, Theodore turned down the passage and went into his bedroom.

§ 4

The Sunday dinner hour at Manygates was at one o'clock, and Sabina had escaped to her room by 1.30. Sabina's room was a limbo entirely vacuous as an expression of the occupier. There was texts upon the wall, the picture of a large dog playing with a little dog, and various relicts of Sabina's kindergarten activities in beads and coloured wool. Her dressing table was a chest of drawers with a small looking glass and the usual china receptacles containing odd buttons, hooks and eyes and hair-pins. The glass was tarnished, and, as the window was heavily draped with lace curtains, originally white but now grey with yellow patches, there was little light. She had to put her head close to the glass when she wanted to see whether her face was really clean or the parting in her hair as straight as it should be.

Sabina had never realised the inadequacy of her looking-glass so keenly as this afternoon. But she

was less troubled about her looking-glass appearance than about the state of her hands. Her face, she knew, could be left to take care of itself, but her hands were a torment. She scrubbed them with pumice and dipped into various bottles, but still they showed the wrinkles of hard labour.

Sabina had lived in a happy dream since the evening of her meeting with Guy. At last she had really escaped. Her father and the daily round were phantasmal, and the one reality of her world was that she would see Guy again almost before she had exhausted the sweetness in retrospect of their last meeting. Her father commented harshly upon her absence of mind.

Sabina, now and then, found herself narrowly eyed by the young labourer who was living on the farm. She hardly noted this, however. She was too much accustomed to the hard staring of youths. Perhaps she would have paid him more serious attention had she known that, as he watched her at work, he was fingering a ring which she had lately thrown into the road.

§ 5

Guy was first at the meeting place, a Jacob who at last had worked sufficiently for Rachel. On the day which followed his last meeting with Sabina, he had breakfasted with Marian at Balliol, lunched with her again on the river, and begged her and the Duke and Aunt Helen to stay another evening. He had been obliged to supply all the cheerfulness and most of the conversation, and the nicer he was to Marian the more she seemed to resent it. He

could not understand why she failed to respond to his affectionate advances, more especially as he was thinking all the while of Sabina in delicious snatches of unbidden ecstasy, and was thus unable to give more than half his attention to the problem. Incidentally he had also to endure his brother's unspoken criticism. He came to Sabina for his reward.

They met a little awkwardly, less on account of their being in the broad sunlight and subject to the sudden intrusion of wayfarers, than on account of that unavoidable shyness which attends the continuation in cold blood of an ardent relationship.

"It's a fine day for our ride," said Guy.

"Yes," said Sabina, "I thought it was going to rain this morning."

There was a slight pause.

"Hadn't you better climb the bicycle?" Guy suggested.

"You'll have to show me how to sit," said Sabina.

The bicycle started, and soon she was clinging fast. When the novelty of the sensation had subsided she had leisure to be astonishingly happy. Sabina was pleasantly aware of the hold she had upon her furious rider. There is no such intimacy to be had in broad daylight and full in the eye of a censorious world as can be enjoyed upon a motor bicycle. Guy could have ridden for ever thus encircled. He rode as far as Hungerford.

At Hungerford they put up the bicycle and walked at a venture into the country, finding tea at a farmhouse on the way. It was a substantial tea at six o'clock in the evening with eggs and

frizzled ham, which was Guy's idea of a novel experience for a country girl.

Sabina, behind the teapot, was nervous. She wondered continually whether she was sufficiently correct. Guy at the tea-table found conversation difficult. He spent most of the time asking questions about Sabina's way of life and her preferences. Her answers were disconcerting. She was evidently not very fond of life at Manygates, and her preferences were limited.

"I hate the country," said Sabina. "I seem to be shut up and can hardly breathe. Most of all, I hate the trees. I am terrified by trees. I should die if I found myself among trees after dark."

"But up on the hill to-day," protested Guy, alluding to a moment when they had stood watching the cloud shadows as they swam over the floor of the Oxford Plain.

"It was nice up there," said Sabina.

Guy found nothing wrong with the sentiment, and after all the word was not altogether misplaced. It had been "nice" indeed.

At teatime, in a sudden access of frankness brought on by Guy's constant friendliness and understanding, Sabina, after hesitating and flushing a little, called him by his name for the first time.

"Guy," she began.

Guy put his hand on hers, which lay on the table. Sabina made an effort.

"Tell me when I do things wrong, won't you?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"I've been brought up different. I shan't always do things right. You will tell me, won't you?"

"Stuff," said Guy.

He was content to ignore Sabina's blemishes, and it annoyed him that she would not allow him to do so.

Sabina had an ambition to be polite. Her action in taking tea was characteristic. Lifting the cup between her forefinger and thumb, she removed all her other fingers as far as possible out of harm's way. Her little finger aspired to heaven in a final curve.

Guy suddenly realised that he did not like it.

She had asked him hardly a moment ago to tell her. He bent over the table and straightened her fingers on the handle of the cup. Sabina, thinking that a playful caress was intended, smiled.

"Guy," she said, "don't be silly; you'll make me spill my tea."

Then, to show that she really knew how to take tea, she lifted the finger again.

"Put it down," said Guy, in a brotherly way.

Sabina put down her cup.

"No," said Guy; "the finger."

He imitated her grasp of the cup, demonstrating the offence.

Too late he realised his mistake. To admit that you may have social deficiencies is one thing; to be told of them is another. Sabina slowly flushed.

"Thank you," she added. "I think I know my manners."

Guy was immediately abject.

"Sabina, dear. Really it doesn't matter. I don't care a straw either way ; but you told me to tell you."

"I know all about it," said Sabina, in a dry anger. "I don't know how to behave, and there's an end of it."

"Sabina," Guy protested helplessly, "please be sensible."

"Why did you come if you didn't think I was good enough?" she wailed. She covered her eyes with her hands and began to cry.

"Hang it all," said Guy, now thoroughly exasperated, "I didn't——"

Sabina's grief now threatened to become audible.

Guy rose from his chair and looked out of the window. He was repelled by the injustice of her conduct, but this somehow made him all the more anxious to win her back. He came over to her, and she, loudly self-pitying, buried herself in his coat.

"Don't let it make any difference," she sobbed.

Guy gave up any point he might have desired to make.

Peace followed, but it was not till after the ride home that Sabina would forget the incident. She took no more tea at the cottage. She couldn't face the dilemma presented by her little finger. To lift it might after all be wrong ; to lower it would be a capitulation.

6

The day at Hungerford was the first of a series of meetings ; hurried meetings near Manygates ; short walks in the country, and two blissful expedi-

tions, one on the bicycle and one on foot to villages in the neighbourhood.

Sabina wholly surrendered herself to a passion which had nothing to impede it but a rankling sense of inferiority which often made her fancy a slight where none was intended.

The summer term drew to an end, and soon it was Guy's last week at Oxford. On the last evening before going down he walked with Sabina far into the country. They rested long and arrived back at Manygates late in the evening. Guy, being thirsty, called at a public house for beer and pressed Sabina, who also was thirsty, to have some, too. She said she would have some cyder.

She would not enter the inn, so he brought her a tumbler outside. On leaving the inn, Guy, for something to say, sang the praises of English beer. To his surprise, Sabina cut short his rhapsodies.

"I hate beer," she said.

"Have you ever tasted it?" Guy asked.

"No," said Sabina.

"Then how do you know you hate it?" Guy asked chaffingly.

"I hope you wouldn't ask *me* to drink beer," said Sabina.

"Not if you don't like it," responded Guy, surprised at her vehemence.

"Beer," said Sabina decisively, "is a vulgar drink."

"Tastes differ," said Guy.

"I'd rather you didn't drink it yourself," said Sabina. "At least not when you're with me."

"But that's unreasonable," Guy expostulated.

He was feeling within him the stir of the just man confronted with an irrational prejudice.

"I'd rather you didn't," Sabina repeated obstinately.

"But why?"

"Because I object to it."

They had arrived not far from Manygates. Guy saw his last day with Sabina ending in eclipse. It hurt him more for being so obviously absurd. At the same time he was furiously angry. They walked on in silence for a while.

"I suppose," said Guy, who, because the subject irritated him, somehow couldn't leave it alone, "You'd like me to apologise for having beer at the inn?"

"You didn't know I objected," said Sabina, with a maddening air of making excuses for a breach of taste.

Guy lost his temper outright. Their silly argument brought to snapping-point the strain of their social encounters outside the circle of their fatal attraction for one another. He stopped in the road.

"Sabina," he said, "You're being perfectly absurd."

She gave him a poisonous look and walked off, leaving him in the road. She expected him to follow her as he had done before on a similar occasion, but Guy stood fast.

"This is a crisis," he thought.

Her footsteps became fainter and then ceased. He thought she had stopped, but, on looking round, he saw that she had taken to the grass and was crossing to the stile which gave upon the path to

Manygates farm. That she should go off like this for nothing at all after their long day together (and their last day too) amazed him.

"I give it up," he concluded hopelessly.

He walked irresolutely after her for a moment. He reached the stile and looked over. She had arrived at the hedge where they had parted on the night of the theatre party. There she stopped a moment and looked back. Guy signed to her to return. She shook her head, but invited him to come to her. As usual she demanded unconditional surrender. Guy firmly remained where he was. Suddenly she turned away past the high hedge and was lost. For the next hour Guy walked about for some time trying to fathom her perversity. As he allowed nothing for that exasperation of the blood inseparable from their condition, his reflections did not carry him far.

"We get on one another's nerves, I suppose," he told himself at last.

§ 7

He had a light^e supper at an inn near by. He wanted beer, but he ordered claret instead. This was a symptom. Another symptom was his inability to leave the neighbourhood. It was 11 o'clock when he left the inn and began to walk back to Oxford.

He had never seen Manygates farm. Sabina was always thoroughly alarmed at the idea of his coming past the high hedge. Light claret and reckless despair brought him to a halt at the stile. He was leaving Oxford the next day, and he had parted from Sabina in anger. At least he would look

upon the house in which she lay. It was now too late for anyone to be abroad, and the night was dark.

Soon the high hedge was behind him, and the confused dark mass of Manygates was below. A steep hill led down to the back of the farm. He could almost have stepped on to the outbuildings from the hillside, and the windows of the upper storey were on a level with Guy's head as he crept towards them. Soon by putting out his hand he felt a wall. He remained still for a moment, and his eyes, now used to the dark, told him that he was beside a shed which leaned towards the house. Above the roof of the shed was a window of the farm itself. As he stood in the dark, excited by the thought of being so near to Sabina, he heard a rustling overhead. Then a whisper came down to him.

"Is that you, Guy?"

"Sabina?"

"I knew it was you coming down the hill. Guy, you must go at once. I'm frightened."

"But you're glad, Sabina?"

The voice from above whispered: "I don't know what made me so horrible this evening. I don't seem to know what I'm saying sometimes."

The voice ceased for a moment.

"Go now, Guy. You oughtn't to have come," it continued.

"Can you reach me, Sabina?"

"No, you're too far down."

"Try."

"I can't. I'm leaning right out of the window."

"Sabina, let me touch you before I go."

"I can't reach."

He saw her now as a white wraith in the black frame of the window, and began to pull himself up towards her. He heard her catch her breath as he did so. Then she whispered urgently :

"Don't, Guy! I'm terrified someone will see you."

"It's too dark for that," said Guy.

She waited silently. Every sound he made in scrambling up the inclined roof of the shed seemed as though it must wake the whole world. She seemed unable to act. He appeared at the window only as a shadow, a little darker than the night outside, and he could see nothing in the room except her white figure vaguely to the side of the window. He hesitated.

"Give me your hand," he whispered. She did not answer or move. He hesitated no longer, but entered the room and found her breathing beside him. She slipped into his arms.

"You're shivering, Sabina," he said.

"I'm not cold," she assured him. Her teeth chattered as she spoke.

"You're frightened," he said, with a sudden remorse. "I'll go away now—at once. I hate to terrify you like this."

Her grip tightened, and he could feel that her heart was beating fast.

"I'm not really frightened—not now," she said.

"I don't want you to go, not yet."

* * * * *

Time passed unnoticed in the little room till at last the window appeared as a pale patch in the wall, and Guy could see Sabina's face on the pillow thrown into relief by her hair. They perceived that the

darkness was not so dark, and Sabina felt that they were being slowly discovered. She communicated to Guy the fear that sharpened in her, and he made ready to go.

All was quiet as he cautiously descended from the window, except that a dog began to bark on the further side of Manygates.

CHAPTER VI

§ I

GUY came down to London from Oxford with introductions in his pocket to one or two London editors. He took rooms with Powicke in Well Walk, Hampstead.

Things went well with his literary career. One of his introductions was to Mr. Robert Henderson of the *Moderator*. Henderson needed a musical critic. He had heard of Guy from Oxford as a leader of the musical set in the University, a lively practitioner upon various instruments, and a man who had spent his vacations at Leipzig. Guy could, moreover, write about music in comprehensible English, and he was a human being. In short, he was the musical critic for whom most editors in London are looking.

As musical critic of a distinguished weekly Review, Guy received the freedom of no mean literary city. Avenues were opened upon every side, and he shortly began to know many of the young men in London whose names had hitherto been familiar to him only from print or hearsay.

There was a strange duplicity in Guy's life at this time. In London he lived upon ideas, on music, on the gratifying progress of his reputation, on the delight of earning money in the open

market, upon the interest aroused by new acquaintances.

Out of this London life he would slip away to Sabina. They met in the open country, and their meetings were prolonged into the late evening. As he passed to and fro on his bicycle, the new green of summer darkened in the ageing leaves of the hazel ; the wheat ripened beside him, stood for a while in sheaves, and was gathered away ; the country was gradually lit with the colours of autumn ; and soon he was running through the eddying dry leaves of late October.

They never spoke of marriage. They instinctively avoided a question which threatened their felicity. The question of marriage was bound up with all those disconcerting differences in outlook and intellect, in manner and habit of speech, which made ordinary friendly intercourse so difficult. These differences waited inexorably in the background ; and, when rapture failed, they intruded. But they were ordinarily allowed to lie, except when Sabina occasionally drew attention to her shortcomings with a desperate obscure wish that Guy would reassure her. Guy invariably protested on these occasions that such things did not greatly matter. This failed to pacify Sabina, for it implied that there was something to be overlooked.

§ 2

The meetings with Sabina ceased abruptly towards the end of November. One evening, when Guy returned late from a concert, he saw propped

against the clock a letter with the Abingdon post-mark.

He sat for a while fingering the envelope. For the first time he really faced the question of marriage. He tried to think of Sabina as sharing his life in London. Undoubtedly he loved her, and he felt for her an immense gratitude. There were meetings he could never forget, times when she had given him not herself alone, but the joy of being chosen and admitted to nature's heart.

He opened the letter and read. There was neither heading nor signature, and it ended abruptly as it began :—

Guy, I can't go on any longer. There is a man here on the Farm who gave me the ring that was round my neck on the night the first time you met me. He has seen you, and I am too frightened to have you come again. Besides, what is the use? How can we go on like this? I am wishing for you now, but I have been made to see what dreadful things might happen. I couldn't face them, Guy. I'm not brave enough to go on. I should only be frightened and miserable if you came again. What will you do when you get this letter? I don't care what you do. I won't marry you, because we should quarrel horribly. I have thought it all out and I am sure it wouldn't do. I know quite well it wouldn't. I want you not to come to me any more; that will be best, you will only make me miserable.

Guy realised almost at once that he would take Sabina at her word. Remorse and bereavement conflicted strangely with a sense of relief and restoration.

His letter of farewell to Sabina troubled him greatly. No clear note could come of his contradictory emotions. After several attempts he sent a message which seemed to him curiously stilted. He ended by asking her to let him know, without fail, if ever he could help her in any way.

During the next few weeks Guy experienced a sense of bitter deprivation, but he did not ask to see Sabina again. More and more the new life in London claimed and captivated him.

§ 3

It seemed natural that, as a part of his London life, Guy should try to renew his intimacy with Marian; and he was not a little hurt that his advances in this direction should be rather coolly received. Marian never came to the rooms in Hampstead with Aunt Helen, or showed any apparent interest in Guy's activities. Aunt Helen at last became almost severe with her; and, when Guy asked them both to a Christmas party in Well Walk, she insisted that Marian should accompany her.

Marian was finally persuaded. She came with Aunt Helen and a girl from Newnham. Powicke, sharing the Hampstead rooms, was naturally of the party, and Theodore came from the Temple where he had taken chambers and was reading for the bar.

It became a musical evening. Guy asked Marian to play with him an arrangement for two pianos of a concerto by Bach. Marian pleaded that she was not in the vein, but was overruled by the

company on the principle that two pianos were better than one. Powicke's piano was wheeled in from the neighbouring room.

Marian at first wilfully disregarded Guy's attempts at enthusiasm. Gradually, however, as she became impersonally absorbed into the music, her estrangement from Guy seemed almost contemptible so long as they could meet upon heights such as here were offered. There was a silence as they lingered upon the conclusion of one of Bach's most tragic utterances ; and, poised in sadness for an instant, dipped suddenly into the *vivace*. Marian finished with eyes that sparkled for Guy alone, and Guy reached his hand to her over the piano as they met the applause.

When the party broke up, Powicke took charge of the Newnham girl, and Theodore left for the Temple.

Aunt Helen remained a while with Marian. She perceived that somehow the coolness between Guy and Marian had been removed, though they had not spoken a word. She supposed it was the music. It had somehow gone to their heads. She was satisfied to observe that music after all had its uses.

Guy accompanied them to Fern Cottage, and, at the gate, Aunt Helen, anxious to efface herself, left them with a brief good night. Guy felt extraordinarily reluctant to part with Marian. He had recovered something which immensely mattered, and he wanted to prolong the sensation.

"We must play together more often," he said as they came to a stand."

"The music was good," said Marian.

During their performance she had felt enormously glad that they could be thus secretly intimate in a crowded room, that they could meet in an enthusiasm devoutly shared.

"I have the best of him," she had thought, as again and again their feeling had met implicitly in a perfect phrase.

There was a pause.

"Why not one of our ancient rambles?" said Guy at last.

"Give me five minutes," said Marian. "I will put on some sensible shoes."

She walked with Guy in silence to the Heath, climbed up to Jack Straw, and dropped again to the foot of a little hill covered with gorse and brambles and topped with pines. There they stood awhile, looking over wide stretches of country, silken and cold with mist. After their executive fevers they enjoyed the silence and freshness of the clear December night. Cold airs from the open spaces at their feet rustled up the hill and died away on the further side.

"Marian," said Guy suddenly, "I have missed you badly."

Marian didn't answer.

"Say something," said Guy. "Why was the cold shoulder?"

"Was she very pretty?" she asked suddenly. "Or was it her conversation?"

Guy looked at Marian in some astonishment. Then he said quite naturally,

"I couldn't help myself."

"You cared for her very much?"

" I suppose so," said Guy.

" And now it's finished ? " Marian insisted.

" I don't suppose I shall ever see her again."

He paused and added : " How different we can be at different times."

Marian's pride shrank from any further angling in these waters, but the impulse was strong for a moment. She resisted it, and soon Guy turned to her unprompted.

" It's jolly to be friends again," he said.

He looked at her, cool and companionly, and lightly pressed her fingers as they turned to go down.

CHAPTER VII

§ I

EVERY other Friday Henderson gave a dinner to his contributors, which often included distinguished politicians. Guy began to attend these fortnightly gatherings, and Theodore, who had lately joined the staff of the *Moderator* as a leader-writer, also appeared. On these occasions Theodore gravitated at once towards the men of affairs ; Guy was as certainly to be found among the rogues and vagabonds.

But the rogues and vagabonds who wrote for the *Moderator* had steady balances at the bank ; they belonged to the Travellers' Club, the Beefsteak, or the Savile. They had been born wise, and Balliol had only made them a very little wiser. They prophesied eminence for Guy, when his oats had been sown. Some were a little dubious of the propriety of his sowing them in the *Moderator*, but musical critics, they reflected, were hard to find.

There were times when Guy felt uncomfortably detached from the "Moderators." The shade of Meredith hovered palpably over the discreetly lighted table, and there were times when one half expected Diana of the Crossways to enter upon the arm of Mr. Tonans. Guy would suddenly pine for the louder values of the Café Royal, or

for the cheerful uproar of home parties in Well Walk. He had not yet learned that in the interests of conversation it is often necessary to ignore what cannot be easily and lightly said, and he often resented the orderly complacencies of the dinner table.

§ 2

One night in early spring Guy, after one of these parties, decided to walk home to his rooms in Hampstead. It was a warm evening. He carried his hat and allowed the wind to play with his light overcoat. The dead silence of the blind houses pleased him with its suggestion of shuttered mystery. So far as he thought at all he thought only in pictures. He saw again the table at Henderson's house in Portland Square, choice with flowers and silver and glass. He heard the decent laughter, the low individual conversations suddenly interrupted by a general appeal for attention to a common topic, or to something specially worthwhile; intellect and humour kept well in restraint; a general air of experience and discipline.

Admirably in harmony with all this, Guy suddenly saw Marian dressed for one of their excursions together. It was an impression of clear eyes, an upright carriage, and a voice with intimate tones and a way of uttering his name unlike any other.

These pictures pleasantly suffused his memory. He had seen a good deal of Marian during the winter. They had played the piano together, visited concerts and recitals together, walked together in the country about Harrow and Edgware.

Pictures, in which Marian came increasingly to predominate, alternated with a bleaker panorama, in which an historic Ishmaelite, becoming daily more remote from Mr. Guy Reval, of the *Moderator*—how long ago it seemed!—rode through obscure lanes, chilly and dark in retrospect, to meet a girl now incredibly estranged. He only infrequently remembered Sabina. He had a picture of her now in his mind, as he had seen her upon a cold autumn night of fine rain in late October. In the ray of his bicycle lamp, her hair, glistening with tiny drops of moisture, had given her the aspect of a wraith.

He passed Fern Cottage just before one o'clock in the morning, despatching a warm thought to where Marian lay behind the drawn blinds. He noted that all her windows were wide open, and that the spring air played fantastically with her curtains. It pleased him to think that her room was fresh with the breeze which pulled at his coat.

On reaching his rooms in Well Walk he switched on the electric light and dropped into a chair. He was pleasantly tired, but still disposed to linger the night. He thought of coffee, weighing the energy required to collect the necessary implements against the satisfaction of a pleasant draught. He looked indolently from the sideboard to the coffee pot on the mantelpiece.

On the mantelpiece was a letter. There was something familiar about the shape and colour; something which aroused in him a settled uneasiness which fought unsuccessfully against conviction.

He rose abruptly from the chair and took down

the letter. He was looking at the handwriting of Sabina.

He tore open the letter and his heart sickened as he read :—

King's Head.

Abingdon,

Guy,

I am in the most dreadful trouble, and I want you to come to me here. You told me to tell you if anything happened. I cannot explain, but you must really try to help. Don't fail me, Guy, or I shall do something desperate.

SABINA.

§ 3

So urgent a cry left him no choice; he must find out at once what it meant. Clearly something had been discovered. He realised at once what discovery would mean for a girl who had started at every footstep when they were together, who had always walked with her eyes wide open for the people who passed, and who had often infected him with her own sharp terror.

He changed rapidly into a country suit and put on his overalls. In half an hour he was passing along Watling Street on the way to Oxford. Action was necessary to his peace of mind. He could not see Sabina till the morning, but he could not sleep upon the news of her distress.

CHAPTER VIII

§ 1

FOR several weeks after her night with Guy at Manyates, Sabina had enjoyed the adventure in retrospect. It took the place of the ring round her neck which she had used to finger stealthily as she sat with her father and her sister in the kitchen. She glistened over her secret. Her fear, in thinking of the risk she had run, only added to her private glee. But she dared not again encounter that enormous peril. Dread of discovery was perpetually upon her nerves. Her fear was hardly a reasoned emotion. It was a condition of being. She had a vision of herself standing as sinners were sometimes required to stand in her father's chapel, notoriously a scarlet woman, the text of a loud discourse and subject to the prayers of the faithful. She felt that at any moment a finger might be pointed at her in dreadful accusation. It became, in her dream one night, the finger of a whole congregation, and it was dreadfully like her father's finger, bent at the nail, deformed with labour, but conscientiously scrubbed. Only it was a hundred times larger.

In the open country, more especially when twilight had dulled her sense of being defenceless to observation, she was able, with Guy, to forget her terrors; but she always wanted to be sure

that the people she had met when she was out with Guy were not people that she knew, and when they entered an inn for food she would look rapidly round the room for a possible friend, though the spot were never so unlikely.

Her condition of mind was the product of her early fear of her father, followed by years in which she had been required to live with a heightened consciousness of sin. The inflamed virtue of those among whom she lived infected her with a kind of moral fever. She suffered no real remorse ; but she couldn't help seeing herself with the eyes of her neighbours.

§ 2

In November befell an incident which prompted her to write the farewell letter which Guy had accepted as the end of their relationship. One evening, as she was returning from taking her cattle to the water-meadow, she met George Dudesney, the young labourer to whom reference has already been made. She had thought little enough about George, even when she was wearing round her neck the ring he had given her, and was permitting him the minor privileges of a rustic courtship. Of late she had thought even less. She assumed that the affair between them in the early summer was as little to him as to her. That she should discontinue meeting him, and that he should no longer ask her to do so, seemed entirely natural.

She encountered him in the bend of the road as she was crossing to the stile. To her surprise he put himself in her way. He indicated rustically

that her neglect was beginning to annoy him. She was his girl, he said, and he expected her henceforth to behave as such. The harshness of his voice frightened her, and he used a word which, by its implications, alarmed her still further. He signified that in his opinion she had jilted him.

Sabina was appalled by this unexpected development. Hitherto George had been her humble servant; she could think of nothing to say, and stood silent in the road.

Her alarm turned to anger when at this point he attempted to be familiar. She had always been somewhat distant with him, and she was furious that he should dare to affront her. There was a scuffle.

Even during the scuffle Sabina's mind was obscurely at work on the word "jilted." What exactly did he mean by it? She was not long in doubt, for George, suddenly drawing away from her, informed her with emphasis that, if he were not accepted, no one else should stand in his place. He declared that either she should take back his ring, for her finger this time, or her father should receive some information of interest to all concerned. He produced the ring from his pocket, and informed Sabina that he had picked it up where they were standing, and that on the occasion of his finding it there had also been a motor-bicycle.

Sabina saw the pointing finger of her dream.

She allowed the ring to be returned to her, and went home from that interview to write Guy her letter of farewell.

Sabina's father readily accepted George's proposal. George was a religious man, and Sabina required such a husband. He was a good hand, and shrewd at a bargain. True he was a labourer, but henceforth he could be associated with the management of the farm. Immediate preparations were made for the wedding.

Sabina shrank from the approaching marriage with a nervous repulsion. George divined her feeling, and for the moment respected it. He promised himself to overcome it in due and lawful time.

§ 3

A week or so before the wedding Sabina noticed a curious change in the attitude of the women of the chapel. Conversations, which she divined to be about herself, would suddenly cease on her arrival, and looks were bent upon her which somehow were hardly to be explained as mere interest in a prospective bride. She resented these furtive silences, which filled her with uneasiness. Though she had not heard a single definite word of accusation, she instinctively knew that there was scandal in the air.

After chapel it was the custom of the women to gather in a group on one side of the door and the men upon the other side.

On the Sunday before her wedding, as Sabina was leaving the chapel, and walking towards the women's group, she distinctly heard her name. The whole group instantly became silent when they saw her, and they all looked significantly in her direction. Sabina, hysterical with the stress of

the last weeks, completely lost control of herself. She walked into the group and challenged them, demanding to know what they were saying about her.

They eyed her with a sullen astonishment. One elderly woman called out that nobody had accused her, and another with devout thankfulness declared that conscience was a power. At this point a girl who worked on the farm at Many-gates whispered something to her companions, and they all tittered. Sabina pushed towards the girl and confronted her, hotly bidding her to be civil.

Some of the bystanders attempted to restrain them, but it was too late, and the altercation began to attract the attention of the male group upon the other side of the door. George, coming over to them, wanted to know what the disturbance signified.

The girl who had provoked Sabina said that if George was content no one else had any right to interfere. Incidentally she advised him not to ask too many questions.

George and Sabina walked away under the concentrated observation of the congregation.

George inferred that his neighbours had come to know something about Sabina's recent proceedings. They evidently thought he was being deceived. He would let them know that they exaggerated the importance of the affair. So far as he knew, there had been nothing serious enough to gossip about. He made a point later in the day of seeking out the girl who had laughed, in order to inform her

that the topic was not for discussion, and that he knew all that there was to be known.

§ 4

He came from that interview straight to Sabina, where she was milking. Her face was turned sideways towards the door on the flank of the cow, and she knew at once that something had happened. He simply stood at the door and looked at her. Under his hard eyes she stopped her milking and stared back at him.

He informed Sabina coarsely of a fact which had thrown a new light on her relations with the man from Oxford. Guy had been seen leaving her room at Manygates. Sabina rose from her stool, twisting one of her hands upon the other. She could not find a word to say. George shook with rage before her immobility and challenged her to deny what he had said. When she still said nothing he enquired without delicacy if he might soon expect to be a father.

Sabina pitifully caught at the one shred of justification in sight. "No, George," she said, "I'm not going to have a baby—really I'm not."

She protested that George had always known her story.

George said there was one thing he had not known.

"Does this make any difference, George? I mean," she stammered, "you're going to marry me, aren't you?"

George intimated with a savage irony that it made no difference at all. He would marry her, of

course, to save her character. He was that kind of fool.

At this he left her, swearing that all was over between them.

Sabina had only one thought. She couldn't face her father. She must escape at once from Manygates. She went to an inn in Abingdon, where she had on several occasions had tea with Guy ; and, that same night, she wrote to him her letter of appeal.

CHAPTER IX

§ I

GUY was delayed on the road to Abingdon by a temporary breakdown, and it was nearly seven o'clock in the morning when he reached the inn. Sabina heard him arrive. She was already dressed, and, on hearing the bicycle, she went down to the inn parlour. She heard Guy enquire for her downstairs and gathered that the chambermaid was coming to inform her. She stood awkwardly by the parlour door till the maid, catching sight of her, retreated and told Guy to go up. Sabina went into the room and waited.

Guy came straight towards her. In the brief moment of his advance across the room Guy realised the fulness of her misery. Sabina's prettiness depended much upon her mood and colour; she could only show him to-day a piteous wreck of her good looks. The effect of her appearance was enhanced by the place in which he found her. The inn parlour was shabby and cold, and the ashes of yesterday's fire were in the grate.

"Sabina, dear, what has happened?"

He paused beside her, taking only her hand. The position seemed beyond the reach of endearments. She sat down abruptly in a chair, gripping him.

"I have been alone here for two nights, Guy."

She was crying, and could not recover her breath. Guy stood beside her, unable to say anything.

"Please, Sabina," he entreated at last, "tell me what has happened."

It was some time before Guy could master her position. She told him, with many pauses, of her engagement with George and its sudden breach. Guy felt, as she proceeded, that he was becoming gradually enmeshed in the net of her story, and for a moment he desired to escape. Then, in reaction against an impulse purely of self-preservation, he had remorseful visions of Sabina, lonely and afraid, yielding to hateful necessities, while he had obviously sought fresh pleasures and interests.

§ 2

She told her story in the manner of one who only desired to be relieved of a burden. He knew that when she had finished the responsibility would be his, and that he would have to do something. And yet she seemed almost a stranger. Could the girl who sat thus, awkwardly picking her words and avoiding his looks, be the girl who a few months before had moved him to the heart?

When she had finished her tale, she withdrew her hand, and they remained silent awhile. Guy found his attention wandering irrelevantly from detail to detail of the room. The carpet under his eyes was frayed. He counted the threads and tried to reconstruct the pattern. He had no impulse either to act or speak; his feelings were too confused.

Sabina suddenly looked up, meeting his puzzled eyes. Their dubiety awakened in her at once a sense of her insecurity. She caught at his coat, and almost clung to him.

"You're going to help me, Guy?" she asked, her voice sharp with alarm.

Guy gently released himself and walked to the mantelpiece.

"Of course I'm going to help you," he assured her.

"I can never go back to father," said Sabina.

"You must come to London," Guy decided.

"I will find you something to do."

Sabina's heart sank curiously. She had not deliberately thought of marriage; but, now that he indicated a solution which flung her upon the world, she realised that she had expected more. She had turned to Guy instinctively for protection. He was her absolute security against the pointing finger. She felt that she could not again bear to lose sight of him.

"Don't send me away, Guy," she pleaded.

"But, Sabina," said Guy, "you will be quite all right in London."

"Don't send me away."

"But what am I to do?"

"Couldn't we be married, Guy?" she asked.

She did not look at him. He measured her need of him by the extent to which she had humbled herself. He saw in her face no longer the physical mask through which feeling peeps now and then. It expressed her in every lineament, and its expressiveness gave it a beauty beyond mere good looks.

Guy saw only her pain, and he saw it with the knowledge that he alone was her physician.

"Ought we to marry, Sabina?" It was all he could say for the moment.

"Don't you care for me any more?" she asked.

"I have never cared for anyone as I care for you."

He could not say less. He had never before touched a human life so closely. No one had ever been so real to him as Sabina, or had moved him so deeply. And yet he would never have sought her again if she had not called him.

He walked restlessly from side to side of the room. There was a silence, which lasted until Sabina could bear no longer the uncertain issue. She caught at him as he passed. The action lifted her from her chair, and almost brought her to her knees.

She clung to him in a panic.

"Guy, I don't care how it is, but let me stay with you."

She continued to plead intolerably, as though nothing could stop her, asking Guy to remain with her, even though he didn't marry her.

Guy broke from her again.

"Let me think, Sabina," he said

He went to the window and stared out into the road. He never once thought of taking Sabina upon any terms but marriage. She could not really face the alternative she had suggested. In the closed room with its problem which could not be denied or postponed he again felt the sensation of being trapped.

He turned away from the window. Sabina was

looking towards him. Her face was stained with weeping. She had lost the flush of her entreaty, and sat forlorn as if for judgment. Her eyes enquired of him whether he would be merciful.

Guy could no longer endure it.

He lost all sense of his predicament and went towards her. A tenderness beyond pity overcame every other emotion in him. He took her face between his hands and kissed her, and Sabina knew that he had consented. She collapsed awkwardly beside him, and lay there stifling the compunction which at once rebuked a security she had so hardly won.

§ 3

They arranged to be married within the lawful period by special licence at Abingdon. Sabina purchased all that was necessary for herself out of her savings. Guy paid a hasty visit to London to bring away some of his personal effects and to raise some money.

On the night before their wedding they dined together in the rooms which Guy had taken at Abingdon and discussed the arrangements for the next day. They tacitly avoided all reference to the deeper implications of the step they were taking. They discussed clothes and trains, and petty cash. But behind all this was a persistent questioning each of the other and of the mind within. The breach of their old relationship had left much that was unexpressed and unfinished between them, and the new relationship was not yet warm.

At last Sabina rose to go. As Guy made ready to accompany her she stood by the open window. The warm spring air blew a fine spray of hair across her eyes. The street was quick with light and desultory voices. Guy turned out the lamp, and called to her that he was ready ; she turned towards him and his eye was caught by the line of her throat and lifted chin in the light of the window.

He went impulsively to her and stood near. It was his first instinctive movement towards her.

She began to speak, hesitated, and then said :

“ Try not to feel strange with me, Guy.”

“ I suppose everybody feels strange,” Guy answered.

They stood together, almost content, by the window. A couple walked beneath them, and, unaware that they were overlooked, paused in the street a moment and kissed. Guy and Sabina looked at one another and smiled, each remembering how they had often kissed in just that passing way. The incident coloured their thoughts as they walked home, and that night Guy, for the first moment since he had decided to marry Sabina, had only half an eye for the life in London out of which he had been called to this other world of cheap lodgings and registrars and luggage labels. The future was kinder now and less mysterious.

§ 4

The next morning Guy and Sabina were lost in the formalities of their official marriage, the paying of bills, and the fluster of a late dash for the train. They were going to Lynmouth in Devonshire.

During the long hours of the journey, Guy, who was a bad traveller, and Sabina, who had never travelled at all, were largely taken up with the mere adventure of proceeding from one place to another. They were not alone in their carriage, and had no chance for conversation. Guy looked at the girl who had become his wife almost with a kind of astonishment. He was married. That girl with the pale face and brilliant eyes, who lay back in the opposite corner of the carriage, was now intimately his before the whole world. Aunt Helen and Theodore and Marian would know about it. They who had loved in the quiet lanes and woods, and had been so grateful for the darkness which had made them safe, were on their way to a hotel where they would go openly to the same room and remain together. The contrast brought back to Guy, more vividly than the incident of the night before, their love of the previous year ; and more and more often as he looked towards Sabina he became involved in the old emotions. His sense of her beauty returned and became the intense preception of the lover confronted with a baffling perfection.

Recovering the sense of her beauty he began to realise more intimately what she must have suffered. She turned to him occasionally with a questioning look, almost intolerable, as of someone utterly dependent and wondering whether she was really secure at last. He remembered portions of her story. She had contemplated marriage with a fellow whose conduct sufficiently declared his grossness. This grossness was accentuated in

Guy's mind by contrast with the fragility of the intended victim, and by his memory, now thoroughly restored, of her abnormal sensibility. Had they been alone he must, on interrupting one of her questioning looks, have taken her in his arms, obeying an impulse in which many different feelings met and reinforced one another.

§ 5

They arrived at Lynmouth late in the evening. Guy took only one brief glance at their room and came downstairs to order dinner.

After dinner they rambled for a while up the valley and sat where the river broke into rapids, and the wooded hills narrowed upon the water. It was the first time they had been alone since the previous evening, and for a long while they were silent.

"It's beautiful here, Guy," said Sabina at last.

Guy, who had been looking at her face, slightly upraised, so that she could see the sharp line of the trees against the sky, turned to inspect the landscape. It was rather like a stage setting. There were rocks and a cascade and an absurdly round moon coming up over the opposite hill. There was even a nightingale, and the last house in the valley was thatched and displayed a garden of hollyhocks and roses.

He did not answer Sabina, but took her hand, drawn to her rather than estranged by her simple delight. For something to say, and because he was so sensitive now to the least impression she

made on him, he remarked upon the smoothness of her hand.

"I haven't done any work for a fortnight," she said.

Shortly after they walked back to the hotel and Sabina went upstairs.

Guy played awhile on the hotel piano. The drawing room was empty, and the piano was good. He played because he was unable to be idle. At one moment he felt as though he had challenged the world; then he felt rather like a schoolboy doing something of which he knew the authorities would disapprove. The authorities, however, were all in London, and this was Devonshire. It was odd to think of Aunt Helen and Marian sitting now in the drawing room at Fern Cottage. He was playing a gavotte by Bach, a favourite with Marian. He got up restlessly and shut the piano. Somehow this all seemed unreal, and he could not quite believe it. He would not have been surprised if Aunt Helen had suddenly walked into the room and wanted to know what on earth he was doing, standing there alone as though he were waiting for something.

§ 6

Sabina was sitting by the window of their room when he went upstairs. The moon, less absurd now that it had fully risen, was shining hard, and there was no other light. Guy went and sat near her. By the side of the hotel a stream fell noisily from the hill to meet the river.

Guy felt Sabina's hand upon his sleeve, and turned to her.

"Guy, dear, what are you thinking of?"

Her eyes had the questioning look which he hated to see, and the impulse to take her into his arms, which he had previously been compelled to check, overpowered him. For a while they clung together.

She pressed close to him, hurting herself against the roughness of his coat; then he felt her tension relax and she allowed herself simply to be held.

"I feel so safe," she said at last. "It's like going to sleep in the morning when you've had a nightmare, and you daren't shut your eyes in the dark. The light begins to come into the room, and you needn't watch any more."

She went on again after a while: "I'm an awful coward, Guy. Do you remember how frightened I was when we used to be together. I could never love you properly; I could never forget that something dreadful might happen at any moment. You used to be quite angry with me sometimes."

She was silent a while, and then added suddenly: "I wish we were together to-night for the first time."

"Why, dear?"

"It would mean so much more to you if it were the first time."

* * * * *

Hours later Guy was awake and looking at Sabina. She had about her the warm charm of a happy sleeper whose senses are drawing deeply upon nature for refreshment and renewal. She had revealed herself to him as never before. For

the first time, without one thought aside, she had lived only in the moment, and she had loved him with a kind of desperation. There was in her love a jealousy of the past and of the future ; of all that had been, or might be again.

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I

§ I

ABOUT a fortnight after their arrival in Lynmouth Guy sat with Sabina upon a narrow beach under Exmoor. It was a favourite spot. It could be reached only by a long path which angled interminably down the side of the cliff. Here they could bathe and lie in the sun, secure in the knowledge that the only possible intruders could be seen at least a quarter of an hour before they arrived. To people on the moors they were invisible.

Sabina, who had never seen the sea before she came to this beach, could never be drawn away until she became too hungry to stay any longer. Guy was undoing a basket in which their lunch was packed. Sabina sat beside him hugging her bare knees, looking out to sea where a steamer was disappearing over the edge of the water. She was finishing an apple. "Give me another, Guy," she said, when her mouth was empty.

"The fourth," said Guy, throwing her one.

"I love apples, especially after a bathe. I could eat pounds."

"How many pounds?"

"Three pounds. I wonder where that steamer is going? I should love to go in a steamer."

"Where would you go?"

"I should go everywhere, just once, to see what it was like. And then I should come home and have a house up on the cliff with large bay windows. We would bathe every morning, and in the evening we would go to Lynmouth, and you should take me to the pictures or to have dinner at a *table d'hôte*. I love *table d'hôte*. Shall I tell you something, Guy?"

"You're always telling me something."

"I was awfully afraid of *table d'hôte* at first. It's really a bit awkward, having to dig into a dish which a person is holding in one hand. And when the lobster came I didn't know what to do. So I didn't have any. I was most annoyed when I saw you take a claw in your fingers. I love lobster."

Guy was unwrapping various parcels and spreading their contents upon a flat rock half submerged in the sand. "Go on talking," he said.

"Now you're sarcastic," protested Sabina.

"I'm not sarcastic," said Guy. "I like you to go on talking. You never talked before we were married."

"I feel different now. I want you to know everything about me."

"I'm glad you don't really dislike lobster," said Guy. "It would worry me if you did."

"Do you remember how we used to quarrel before we were married?" asked Sabina.

"Sometimes."

"We quarrelled about nothing at all. Do you remember how we quarrelled once about beer?"

Guy remembered it very well, and for a while Sabina was silent.

"I hope they've put some beer in the basket," she added suddenly.

"Here it is," said Guy.

"We shall never quarrel again," said Sabina.

"Never. Do you think we shall, Guy?"

"Sometimes, perhaps," said Guy. "Just for fun."

"We nearly quarrelled yesterday, didn't we, Guy? Do you remember?"

"I'm not going to remember."

"I've come to the conclusion that you were right," Sabina continued rather more seriously.

"I don't think evening dress is really immodest, not when you come to consider. It depends on how you've been brought up, I suppose. Do you know what I was doing this morning while you were waiting for me?"

"Haven't the faintest idea."

"Well, you know the pink silk?"

"I do. It's the one with the hooks and eyes."

"Well, I've turned the pink silk into an evening blouse, Guy. Short sleeves and quite low-neck."

"Good," said Guy, pouring himself out a glass of beer. "Here's to the pink silk."

Sabina drank a glass of beer at a single draught, and Guy kissed her as she gasped for breath. Her cheek was salt with the sea.

After lunch they sat in the sunlight, till Sabina said she would bathe again. Guy protested that nothing would induce him to move from his hollow in the sand; but, later, when she came to him

out of the water, dripping and breathless, and glistened beside him on the warm beach, he changed his mind.

They remained on the beach till after tea, which they made for themselves. After tea they clambered up the side of the cliff and walked slowly to Lynmouth, with frequent pauses to look down at the sea or away to the coloured crests and hollows of the moor.

"I love the sea," said Sabina; "I shall always want it after this." They were in the act of turning for the last time to go down into the valley. "The sea makes a person feel able to breathe," she continued. "I feel now as if all the other time I'd been living in a box. I shan't want to leave this place."

"Why talk about leaving?" Guy asked. "We've got lots of things to do before we leave."

"What shall we do to-night, Guy?"

"We're going to wear the pink silk."

"Is that all? Let's do something extravagant."

"Champagne?" Guy suggested.

"What is champagne like, Guy?"

"My darling, it's impossible to say. You've either had champagne or you haven't."

§ 2

Guy, having fastened Sabina into the pink silk, came down to the dining room a little in advance, and looked for the wine waiter. The wine waiter was busily engaged with a man in the far corner. The man in question was long in choosing his wine, but the waiter was not impatient, for this

was a gentleman who knew his business, and was not merely fumbling with a wine-list. Guy looked more particularly at the man who thus demonstrated his superiority to the common run of eaters and drinkers.

He realised with a shock that the man in question was Powicke.

He decided at once to escape and warn Sabina, who would be nervous upon a first meeting with one of his friends. He rose to slip from the room, but at this moment Powicke looked up and saw him.

Powicke was clearly only less astonished than disgusted.

"I didn't expect to find you here," said Guy at last.

"You may continue to stay at this hotel," Powicke unexpectedly answered. "But you mustn't know me. It's uncomfortable. But the cat is already out and about. Everybody in London knows, except Dad and the family lawyer. And Dolly will probably tell them herself. She tells everybody. Go back to your solitary dinner, Guy, and ignore your friend for the rest of the evening. And please turn your chair to the wall. I hate her to be looking at another man when she's talking to me."

Guy was too full of his own affairs to see much significance in all this. As usual Powicke was talking nonsense.

"Arthur," he said, "stop talking like an idiot and listen. I'm not alone."

Powicke stared a moment, and was then irradiated with smiles. Before, however, he could

answer, a woman entered the room. Guy thought he had never seen anybody so expensive.

"Hullo," she said at once, "Arthur's found a friend."

"Dolly," said Powicke, "it's a foursome. Tell me what to do."

"Well here we are, I suppose," said Dolly.

"Why not just be sociable?" she added after a pause, during which she had carefully inspected Guy.

At this moment Sabina entered the room, and they all turned to look at her. Guy had not yet recovered his presence of mind, or formed any clear idea of his friend's position. Powicke had said something about Dad and the family lawyer, and here he was with a sumptuous young woman honeymooning in a West Country hotel. Apparently Powicke had caught the social epidemic which had reached its height just at that time—he had married somebody rather bright.

Sabina bravely advanced to meet them. She had never seen anyone to compare with the resplendent lady in front of her. This was one of Guy's superior friends. She called up her courage.

"Won't you introduce us, Guy?" she said timidly, as she arrived in the circle.

"What's in a name?" said Dolly, cheerfully. "Bad habit to throw names about."

Here the waiter intervened.

"Table for four?" he suggested.

"Why not?" said Dolly.

Guy was heard introducing his wife to Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Powicke. Dolly looked at Sabina with some disdain. She had decided that Sabina

was pretty. But where on earth had she bought her clothes? Dolly did not like a woman who wore less than fifty guineas. Besides, this was obviously one of those country mice who affected a demure habit in order to make themselves perversely attractive. She thought it was bad taste to play the wife on these occasions.

Powicke disliked the look of Guy's affair altogether. Sabina seemed rather a nice girl, and there was something forlorn about her. Somehow it seemed a shame. And in any case it was rough on Marian, to whom Guy was virtually engaged. Anyhow there they all were. It was six of one and six of the other, and it was no use thinking about it.

There was a slight hesitation as they all four stood beside the table, which the waiter was now arranging for four.

"Do we cut for partners or what?" said Dolly, who somehow felt bound to lighten the atmosphere. She called them impatiently to the oysters, and they sat down. Guy was inwardly blaming his friend for having married a chorus girl. Powicke was secretly wondering how an engaged bachelor came to be spending the week-end with a girl who was not at all his idea of that sort of a girl. Sabina was hoping that *table d'hôte* would not be too much for her this evening, and that she would make a favourable impression on the great lady who did not approve of introductions. Dolly had decided that the only salvation of the evening lay in large quantities of champagne.

Sabina had never eaten oysters before, and,

having put one into her mouth, was confronted with a painful situation. She swallowed it with difficulty, and knew there would be yet more difficulty about swallowing another. And there were five confronting her. She looked across towards the great lady. The great lady had eaten six, and was beckoning imperiously for a further supply. Sabina felt that it was somehow disgraceful to dislike oysters. She was sure that none of the best people disliked them. She supposed that oysters were an acquired taste, and that not to have acquired it was a mark of social inferiority.

She put another oyster into her mouth. For several miserable moments she struggled to deal with it. Finally, with a tremendous effort, she induced it to join its predecessor. In that moment she knew that not to save her life would she be able to swallow another. She ate brown bread and butter with an air of enjoying it so well that the oysters would have to wait.

"We must have lots of oysters," said Powicke suddenly.

"By general request?" he enquired, looking round the flowers at Sabina's plate.

Sabina flushed and stammered: "Not for me. Thank you very much."

"Don't you like them?" Powicke asked.

"I don't think I do," said Sabina. "At least, not to-night," she added hastily.

"How funny!" said Dolly, who had already eaten a dozen. "To like oysters on Monday and not to like them on Tuesday."

Guy came hastily to the rescue.

"*Varium et mutabile semper femina*," he quoted.

"What's that mean?" said Dolly. "Is it something nice about your young friend, or something nasty about me?"

The arrival of the champagne deflected her train of thought.

Sabina was a little afraid of the champagne. Would it be as difficult as the oysters? To her great joy the waiter had quietly removed her four remaining ones. Her heart misgave her as she raised her glass.

"Here's luck," said Dolly cheerfully. She touched glasses with Arthur, and Sabina realised that she also was expected to touch glasses. With an excited feeling that she was acquiring the etiquette of the great world, she touched with Dolly and with Guy, and, feeling even more privileged, touched also with Mr. Powicke. The next moment she became sweetly aware that champagne was not difficult to swallow.

"Seems rather a quiet place," said Dolly, looking out of the window.

A few people were standing on a little bridge over the rapids. There were not more than a dozen persons in the dining room, and the sound of their voices was covered by the noise of the water.

"The country here is beautiful," said Sabina.

Arthur looked at this increasingly enigmatic girl who thought the country was beautiful.

§ 3

An alarming idea had begun to intrude. Guy had introduced the girl as his wife. Suppose it

were true. Suppose he had really been introduced to Mrs. Guy Reval?

"Scenery's no good to me at all," said Dolly. "But Arthur insisted upon coming here. Arthur first saw me when I was a Diving Belle, and he can't forget it. He's going to take me to a wonderful beach to-morrow where I can be a Diving Belle all the morning."

"That must be our beach," said Sabina.

She was wondering on what kind of social occasion a great lady might appear as a Diving Belle.

"I shan't mind a crowd in the least," said Dolly. "I'm used to it."

By this time Guy also had begun to feel uneasy. His ideas progressed with difficulty. He was asking himself whether Powicke had or had not said he was a married man. He could not remember. Dolly was fast becoming incredible as Mrs. Powicke. She had looked at him once or twice in quite a special way. He collected himself.

"It's my beach, Arthur," he said. "We can't share it with anybody, can we?" he continued, turning to Sabina.

"It's a nice beach," said Sabina. The champagne was already having some effect on her, and she felt a strange need to be confidential.

"I think the sea is lovely," she added.

At this moment she intercepted one of those special glances which Dolly from time to time was directing towards her husband. The look raised in her a slight uneasiness. Hitherto she had

attributed the great lady's way of speaking to a carelessness, or possibly even a corruption, natural in the higher levels of society. Sabina now began to feel unaccountably hostile. At this moment, however, she was distracted by the arrival of the waiter, who was at her elbow handing vegetables. There was a short silence.

"Been here long?" said Arthur, whose wits were now thoroughly about him.

Sabina turned to him all the more readily, owing to an unmistakable chill which had come into the air.

"Only a few days," she said.

"And you really like the place?"

"I love it," said Sabina. "But I suppose any place would do. You see it's our first holiday together, and I've never had a holiday like this before."

This speech strangely excited Dolly, who had just emptied her fourth glass of champagne.

"The little white lamb!" she exclaimed. "She'll be telling us next that her father was an archdeacon."

Sabina turned to her in amazement.

"Why should I say that?" she asked.

"It's a joke," said Powicke, intervening hastily.

"I'm sorry," said Sabina, flushing. "I suppose I'm stupid."

She paused, a little confused with the wine and the strange feeling that something was wrong. Powicke thought she might be going to cry, not knowing how easily the small quiver came to her lips.

"It's a sort of family joke which you needn't trouble to understand," he explained.

He exchanged glances with Guy. The two men now realised the position. It was one without precedent, and neither of them knew what to do. For Sabina it would be clearly disconcerting to discover that she had been so grossly mistaken, and they both instinctively desired to protect her. Meanwhile Dolly was still drinking champagne, and it was becoming more and more impossible to live up to Sabina's conception of her social position. Powicke, who remembered that Dolly in her cups was quarrelsome, saw himself very shortly explaining things to Mrs. Reval.

"You see, I thought we were all in the same boat," he imagined himself saying. "I hadn't the least idea you were really married to your husband."

It did not seem a very happy explanation.

The waiter again came to the rescue.

"Asparagus!" Powicke exclaimed, with immense heartiness. "They are doing us particularly well here."

"I love *table d'hôte*," said Sabina over the brim of her glass. "You never know what's coming next."

"The asparagus is just right," said Guy.

"I can't fiddle with that stuff," said Dolly. "It's like trying to pick a ham bone hanging at the end of a string with your hands tied."

"What a funny thing to do," laughed Sabina.

"It's not done in the best circles, I understand," said Dolly, *falsetto*.

Sabina flushed under a sense that offence was intended, though she did not know how or why it should be.

"I once tried to eat an apple that way," said Powicke, breezily.

"And what happened?" Guy asked, casting about for an excuse to break up the party.

"I lost the bet," said Powicke.

"That was very wrong of you," said Dolly, with a horrible gravity. "What would the archdeacon say?"

Dolly, having passed the asparagus, was playing with a rose, which she had taken from her waist. After coquettishly nibbling the stalk, she leaned across the table and began to draw imaginary lines with the bitten end of it upon either side of Guy's nose. She paused for a moment in this pastime, and looked pointedly at Sabina.

Sabina, still in the grip of her original misconception, looked speechlessly towards her interlocutor, and answered with a quiver:

"I don't understand."

Dolly looked resentfully at Powicke, whose evident wish to protect Sabina annoyed her.

"Arthur," she said, "explain to the lady?"

"Same old family joke," said Powicke miserably.

"But not in my family," said Dolly, now a little uncertain of her utterance. "There's never been an archdeacon in my family."

§ 4

Her own glass being empty, she reached across and took the glass belonging to Guy. On drinking

she looked at him over the rim in a way that Sabina could no longer mistake. It illumined the whole situation. Her instinct leaped at the relationship between Powicke and the woman confronting her, and in a moment she perceived the absurdity of her former delusion.

The room swayed for a moment about her.

There seemed to be nothing at which to catch for safety. She rose from her chair.

It appeared as though she had been the object of an intentional humiliation; but jealousy came first. She had never felt it before. It was like a physical pain.

"How dare you look at my husband like that?" she said in a low voice.

"Sabina, dear," said Guy, rising at once. "There has been a mistake. We mustn't make a scene."

"Scene?" said Dolly contemptuously. "Do you call this a scene?"

Sabina's jealousy had flared itself out. She saw now only that she had been allowed to associate on equal terms with a light woman. Without a word she turned to go. Guy moved towards her; but she went blindly out of the room. It all happened so quickly that none of the people at the other tables noticed anything unusual.

Dolly, who was about to demonstrate what a scene was really like, looked in amazement after Sabina as she went out. Turning to Powicke she saw that he was looking at Guy, and that both of them were really upset.

"Sorry, Guy," Powicke was saying. "You'd

better go and clean up the mess. I shan't be here to-morrow."

"What's all this about?" said Dolly.

Powicke explained it to her, while Guy was on his way upstairs. but Dolly was not impressed. Her view, put with some asperity, was that the girl ought not to have married the young man, and that worse things would happen to them than dinner with a Diving Belle. Arthur thought anxiously about his friend for quite five minutes. Then he ordered some more champagne and decided that it was a man's first duty, in this complicated world, to manage his own affairs.

§ 5

Guy found Sabina stretched on the bed, wildly lamenting. She rejected all his attempts to comfort her, and he was at last reduced to sitting foolishly beside her while she afflicted herself by dwelling on all the implications. She talked between fits of sobbing and then relapsed, only to take up the burden again when she was sufficiently recovered. She saw the incident from the outside, and her own share in it as something dramatically pitiful. She was sometimes strangely clear in her perception of the significance of the things which happened to her. This clarity (as of a spectator seeing things at a distance) added poignantly to her capacity for self-distress.

"Why didn't you warn me, Guy? You must have known."

"It was quite a natural mistake, dear. I didn't know myself till the end."

"What must your friend have thought?" she burst out afresh. "He must have thought I was the same as her. You oughtn't to have allowed it, Guy—letting me sit down with a person like that."

Her wounded gentility smarted under the lash.

"I'll never forgive you, Guy. You ought to have told me at once. It was cruel."

There was another pause.

"I can never face any of your friends after this," she cried.

"Nonsense," said Guy. "Sabina, darling, do be reasonable."

"How can I possibly meet them? The story will be everywhere."

"Sabina, dear, Arthur won't say a word."

"It's too good a story to lose."

"Sabina," said Guy almost angrily, "don't torment yourself in this way. Nothing at all has happened really."

But Sabina in her heart knew better; and, of the two, she was perhaps the wiser. For the first time the problem of their misalliance had intruded. It had intruded suddenly and absurdly, but it could not be laughed away.

Guy, as he argued against his wife's distress, felt the presence of something intricately disconcerting. Meanwhile he praised and comforted her. He reminded her how his friend had liked her, and evidently wished to protect her when the position had become clear. He pointed out that he, too, had been mistaken.

Finally, Sabina allowed herself, exhausted with

weeping, to be soothed, though she could not be convinced.

She slept at last ; but Guy could feel that, now and then, she was shaken unconsciously with a sob, which broke from her heavily, as a wave breaks long after the storm has spent itself.

CHAPTER II

§ I

GUY did not send word of his marriage to Aunt Helen until within three days of his return to London. He wrote quite briefly that he had married a country girl. He had married her in some haste, because she was unhappy at home, and had run away from her father. They had gone to Devonshire for a short holiday, and he would bring his wife to Hampstead as soon as they returned to London. In a postscript he asked Aunt Helen to tell Marian.

"Now I know why he borrowed fifty pounds," said Aunt Helen, as she read the letter.

She wondered what Guy might mean by a country girl. She tried to hope it was not quite as bad as it seemed. At the best, it was bad enough. He had put Marian into a postscript.

At that moment Marian was finishing a set of tennis with Theodore. Aunt Helen could see them playing through her window. She so hated to tell her niece what had happened that she almost decided to say nothing until the married pair had actually arrived in London. A moment's reflection caused her to realise that this might involve too painful a surprise. Marian ought to have time to prepare herself.

The game was soon finished, and the players came into the room.

"Any post?" asked Marian, looking at the letter in Aunt Helen's hand.

"There's nothing for you, dear," said Aunt Helen.

Marian went away to change for dinner. Aunt Helen knew why she had asked for letters. Nothing had come from Guy since he had suddenly gone away, over three weeks ago.

"Can you dine with us to-night, Theo?" Aunt Helen inquired.

"I was hoping to do so," said Theodore.

"Haven't you heard from Guy yet?" he said a moment later.

"Why do you ask?"

"Well, for one thing, Guy said nothing to Henderson about going away, and there have been some important concerts. He ought to have asked for leave."

He meditated a moment, and added cheerfully: "He can't stay away much longer. He hadn't a penny when he left. I had to lend him ten pounds."

"Unfortunately," said Aunt Helen, "I lent him fifty."

"Good gracious," said Theodore, "that may last him a couple of months, with care."

Aunt Helen smiled grimly.

"It won't last nearly as long as that, my dear boy. There are two of them."

"What do you mean by two of them?"

"What does it usually mean?"

Theodore thought of Marian, and flushed angrily.

"But he's as good as engaged."

"He's more than engaged," said Aunt Helen.

"He's married."

Aunt Helen handed him Guy's letter.

Theodore read it with an increasing indignation. When he came to the postscript he threw the letter violently on the table.

"Does Marian know?" he inquired.

"Not yet," Aunt Helen replied.

§ 2

Half way through dinner the mail brought in a later post. As a family they were remarkably fond of letters, and the posts were always handed round as soon as they arrived. There was a picture postcard for Marian with a view of the waterfall at Lynmouth.

"From Guy," she announced, as though it were of little consequence. "He's coming home almost at once." She looked at it again for a moment.

"What does he mean by this?" she asked. "He says: 'Coming home in a day or so. This is a lovely place. Wish you could have been here to see it in this glorious weather. Aunt Helen will have told you my news.' Have you had any news, Auntie?"

There was a short silence.

"I had some news just before tea," said Aunt Helen at last. "But I thought it could wait."

Marian had spent several weeks anxiously wondering why Guy should suddenly have left her at a moment when their friendship seemed about

to ripen into something closer. Enough had passed between them to make his conduct appear both inconsequent and unkind. It almost amounted to downright infidelity, especially when he did not write. She now feared the worst without being able to conceive what the worst might be. She looked steadily at Aunt Helen.

"This means, I suppose, that your news is bad?"

"I still think it can wait until after dinner," said Aunt Helen.

Marian was both too proud and too frightened to press for further information. Dinner was quickly finished. Conversation turned for refuge to the impertinence of Aunt Helen's parlour-maid, who had given notice.

Marian had put an advertisement in the *Morning Post* for a new one.

After dinner Theodore remained with his coffee in the dining room. Aunt Helen took Marian into the drawing room, where they had coffee outside the open window.

When the maid had withdrawn, Aunt Helen handed Marian her letter from Guy. Marian read it, and, without making any comment, sat looking into the garden. Aunt Helen wondered exactly how much it was costing her niece to sit so stedfastly and look so long at the flowers which she did not see.

"I wonder what she is like?" said Marian at last.

Aunt Helen realised that Marian desired the affair to be treated without reference to its more sensitive implications.

"We must be prepared for the worst," she said.

"Something stout and strapping, with a burr."

Marian was recalling what Guy had said to her on the hill at Hampstead. There had been a girl at Oxford, but he had assured her that this affair was at an end. He certainly had not intended to get married when last they had talked together.

Aunt Helen, somewhat staggered by Marian's quiet reception of the news, broke into her reflections.

"Did you know anything at all about this?"

"No, Auntie. At least——" Marian paused.

"Then you did know something?"

"I knew there had once been a girl, but Guy told me that it was all over. He no longer cared for her. I'm sure he was telling me the truth."

"How long ago was this?"

"I think he was still seeing her quite recently."

"And suddenly he has married her," said Aunt Helen.

The two women looked at one another. There is only one superlatively good reason why a man marries a woman for whom he has ceased to care. Marian suddenly felt the need to be alone, where the sickness at her heart would be beyond reach of betrayal.

"I'm going to my room, Auntie," she said with a kind of cold defiance. "You are not to come to me. I want to be alone."

She kissed her Aunt good night and went away.

Her thoughts during the night wandered from one bitter alternative to another. At one moment she hoped that Guy had been forced into this marriage. That at least left her reason to suppose that his last impulse towards herself was not wholly

an illusion. But the squalor of such an episode revolted her ; she hated to think of Guy as miserably entrapped. She even preferred the other alternative of a marriage by inclination. He must have yielded to that old attraction which once before had carried him away from her.

Marian would admit no jealousy. She hid from herself its bitter presence, and her mind darted for escape to any other aspect of the problem than that of her own bereavement. She dwelt most hopefully on the passage in Guy's letter in which he briefly stated that his wife had been unhappy at home. This gave a touch of Quixotry to the enterprise, something she could understand and applaud in Guy without being required to forfeit to the girl he had rescued all claim to his heart.

§ 3

Two days later, in the afternoon, Guy arrived with Sabina at Waterloo. Since the catastrophic evening at Lynmouth they had wandered from place to place, finally entraining for London at Seaton in East Devon. No further mention had been made of the meeting with Powicke, but the memory of it lay between them. Guy had thought once or twice of making humorous allusions to the incident ; but he was beginning to be aware that he did not know Sabina well enough to take any liberties with her pride.

From Waterloo Guy took Sabina to his rooms in Hampstead. He had ascertained that his landlady would accommodate them both until he could find other quarters.

Sabina was excited by her first arrival in London and the drive home. Nevertheless she could not avoid a sinking of the heart. She would have to meet Guy's people, including that cousin of whom she was already prepared to be jealously apprehensive.

They had tea in Guy's rooms. It seemed very quiet and domestic after their hotel life. This was where they would have to settle down. They talked at random to cover the fact that they were thinking of the introductions which lay before them.

At Fern Cottage, as the parlour-maid had just departed, and the new parlour-maid engaged by post had not yet arrived, Guy rang the bell in vain. He decided to take Sabina round by the garden door. The drawing-room windows were open, but no one was to be seen. He told Sabina to sit down, and said he would run upstairs to find somebody.

"Aren't we expected?" Sabina asked, a little fearfully.

"Not at any particular time," Guy answered. "I said we should come along in a few days."

"Let's wait here," said Sabina. "Somebody's sure to come soon."

"Stuff," said Guy. "We'll get it over."

§ 4

He left her sitting on the edge of the chesterfield looking strangely small and prim. She had put on the coat and skirt she had bought especially for London. She wanted to call Guy back. She looked round on the flowers and pictures and

chintzes, and thought how unattainably nice they all were.

Suddenly she heard a key in the lock of the front door. The front door was opened and closed, and steps approached the room where she sat. She looked at the open door with a kind of scared and respectful attention.

She divined it was Marian as soon as she saw her enter. She rose from the chesterfield in a sudden agony of deference, longing to hear Guy upon the stairs. She perceived that Marian was surprised to see her there. Then she realised that Marian was welcoming her in a curiously impassive way, and inquiring whether she had come straight from the station. Would she like to have some tea, or be shown at once to her room?

"We were expecting you yesterday," Marian was saying. "Our other maid has already gone."

When Guy came into the room a moment later he noticed that Sabina was very pale, and that her eyes were painfully bright.

"You'd better tell your cousin who I am," Sabina said. "She takes me for a servant."

"What's all this," said Guy, sensing a catastrophe.

Marian had flushed with a hideous vexation. The whole position was so cruelly absurd. She went straight to Sabina.

"How idiotic!" she exclaimed. "The sun was in my eyes and I couldn't see a thing. We were expecting a maid from the country."

"You needn't think I mind," said Sabina.

"It's for me to mind," said Marian. "It makes me look so silly. And I wanted to make a good impression."

Sabina hated Marian all the more for trying to be nice. That lie about the sun in her eyes enraged her, because it was so obviously designed to spare her feelings. She had felt Marian deliberately surveying her as she came into the room, as though she were making up her mind whether she would "do."

"You needn't be nice about it, thank you," Sabina flashed. She turned to Guy in a burst of miserable temper.

"For heaven's sake don't stand there like a post. Can't you see I want to go away?"

Marian almost flung herself between them.

"You mustn't leave us like that," she said. "Please let me put right this silly mistake."

Sabina turned from them, and looked for a moment out of the window. She saw herself again from the outside, as when she had waited for Guy in the road at Oxford, and as when she had realised all the implications of the disastrous incident at Lynmouth. She turned to Marian.

"You can't ever put this right," she said, with an awful deliberation. "You have told me the truth about myself. You know it is the truth, and so do I."

That peculiarly uncomfortable silence fell upon the room which occurs when somebody says something which everybody would like to contradict, but which everybody knows to be true. It lasted only a second, but it was fatal.

"Come to my room," said Marian, "and take off your hat. I'm sure we can make friends by ourselves."

Sabina turned to Guy with a questioning look. Guy put his arm round her shoulder.

"Yes, dear," he said. "Go with Marian."

§ 5

Upstairs Marian did all in her power to repair her error, and she almost succeeded. Sabina accepted her advances with a kind of sullen curiosity.

"This," she thought, "is how ladies behave when they are sorry."

Marian did not allude again to the incident in the drawing room. She praised the hat Sabina was wearing, and frankly admired her prettiness. She talked of Guy as women talk of a man whom they like, and have a right to discuss with domestic familiarity, and in talking of Guy she delicately assumed that Sabina must really know more about him than anyone else.

"I feel almost jealous," said Marian with the audacity which conceals a secret by exposing one half of it. "Guy used to be rather fond of me. But he wrote a letter from Devonshire about you, and put me into a postscript."

A bitter little smile flickered on Sabina's mouth.

She had seen a postcard on Marian's dressing table with a picture of the fall at Lynmouth where she had often rested with Guy; and in Guy's enormous hand she had read: "Wish you could

have been here to see it in this glorious weather."

Guy and Sabina spent the evening at Fern Cottage with Aunt Helen, who came in later, and with Marian. They encouraged Sabina to talk of her holiday, and laid plans for finding a little house somewhere in Hampstead. But Sabina hardly talked at all. She was divided between admiration and distrust. She was so obviously the object of a beautiful deceit.

She thought Aunt Helen was the kindest person she had ever met, but she must surely have heard about the parlour-maid, and her apparent unconsciousness of anything amiss savoured of conspiracy. It did not improve the position for Sabina that the real parlour-maid had by this time appeared. Sabina noted that the real parlour-maid was infinitely "ladylike." The real parlour-maid even corrected her table manners; for, as she was in the act of putting salad among her peas and potatoes, the adjacent salad plate was gently insinuated upon her notice.

After Guy and Sabina had gone home, Aunt Helen and Marian stayed up late discussing what had happened.

"In a way," said Marian, "it was a tragedy, my coming in like that, but at least I know why he married her. I felt for her as one feels for a pretty child or animal that has been hurt. I felt it all the more as I knew it was almost impossible to stroke her without being scratched."

"If I were a man," said Aunt Helen, "I should love her for three weeks and then I should want to put her out of her misery. Meanwhile it is our

duty to civilise her. It will be a difficult business, and I really don't know what to do."

"We must ask Theodore about it," said Marian.

§ 6

That evening Guy, sitting with Sabina in their room, feared a repetition of the scene at Lynmouth. But Sabina was strangely quiet. She was, indeed, absent and thoughtful to such a degree that Guy was moved to bring her into touch with him.

"Tell me," he said, after a long silence, "what do you think of them?"

"They did their best," said Sabina.

"And that stupid affair doesn't matter?"

"I'm trying to forget it," said Sabina, "if you'll only let me."

Guy did not feel encouraged to continue. After a while Sabina said suddenly: "I suppose you're very fond of your cousin."

"We're great friends."

"You wrote to her while we were at the sea."

"A postcard," said Guy.

"You said you wished she were there."

"Did I say that?"

"You know you did."

"I wished she could have seen the place."

"I didn't want anybody else," said Sabina.

"Nor did I really," said Guy.

"You wanted her to see the place, and yet you didn't want her to be there," said Sabina.

"I thought of Marian, and wished she could be as happy as I was."

"That was very nice of you," said Sabina.

He went quickly to her side.

"Darling," he said, "you know I only wanted you."

She looked up at him, and something in her look caused him to lose all control of himself. Love and fear and resentment and a pain which affected him almost like a physical wound were in her eyes. He kissed her and his speech became mere endearment—incoherent, absurd, ungoverned.

It was the best consolation he could bring. She lay a while in his arms, and then, gripping him fast, said that as long as he loved her nothing else could matter.

CHAPTER III

§ I

A FEW days after his arrival in London Guy went to the Temple to find his brother. He had waited for Theodore to make a sign, but Theodore had hardened his heart.

Without any preface or previous allusion to his marriage, Guy said suddenly :

" You must come and see her, Theo."

" Was this the girl you met at Oxford ? " Theodore briefly inquired.

" Yes," Guy admitted.

" Why have you married her ? "

" She was unhappy."

" Anything else ? "

" I care for her tremendously."

Theodore got up and walked about the room. He wanted to make his brother see the position as he saw it. But he could say nothing to the point without involving Marian. He pulled up suddenly opposite Guy and said :

" Where are you going to live ? "

" Why not Hampstead ? "

" Can you afford it ? "

" £200 from the *Moderator*," said Guy ; " £200 of my own, and pickings. I should think we might run to it."

" The *Moderator* is uncertain," said Theodore.

"You won't keep any job long, if you go off suddenly in the middle of a busy time and say nothing about it."

"I never thought of that," said Guy.

§ 2

They went out to Hampstead, where they found Sabina struggling with modern books. They talked for a while about the holiday in Devonshire. Sabina felt more at her ease with Theodore than with anyone she had so far met in the new life. His serious eyes and quiet deliberate manner seemed to assure her that here was a man on whom she would be able to rely. She felt she could, if necessary, tell him things. He had the same fundamental kindness in his nature as Guy; but he seemed to suffer from none of those elfin intrusions which mocked at the heels of Guy's most serious moods.

Meanwhile Theodore was assessing this tragic partnership. He felt the eagerness and simplicity of her nature through the preliminary awkwardness of their meeting; and, as he answered and asked questions of no consequence, he was telling himself how cruelly she would suffer.

And yet he could not be angry with Guy. Guy, eager that he should be favourably impressed, anxiously watched the effect of all she said, and was clearly delighted to see that she liked Theodore from the start. Theodore thought of them down by the sea, and for a moment suffered that small twist of envy which the quiet people sometimes feel when they realise there are heights and depths

beyond the middle levels of experience. Now and then he intercepted looks between the two of them speaking a celestial language. He realised that they had achieved an intimacy beyond his reach.

And all the while he felt afraid for them. It was not merely that this strange idyll **did** not fit in with the work his brother had to do and the position he hoped his brother would achieve. The relationship itself seemed perilous. It had an intensity which put it out of touch with the normal. It seemed somehow to be threatened. Even the maid, who announced that dinner was served in the adjoining room, seemed in a way their enemy. She represented the life of everyday, which for them was something hostile and prohibitive.

§ 3

Later in the evening Marian arrived. She was anxious to repair her error of the day before, and did all she could to start topics which for Sabina were familiar and accessible. But there was almost immediately apparent in Sabina's manner an involuntary stiffening. She became awkward and nervous ; and, when Marian steered the conversation towards country matters, Sabina was so far from seizing her opportunity, that, thinking a deliberate allusion to her origin was intended, she said that she hated the country and wished never to see it again.

Later still Powicke came to be introduced. Sabina flushed when Powicke was announced, and wondered at his assurance when he accepted Guy's introduction as though they had never met before

She felt a bitter resentment against the whole company. The gentleman who had seen her at Lynmouth, and had so grossly mistaken her, could only be behaving nicely to her now out of kindness, and, if he was acting a part, then so were the others. They probably all knew about that incident in Devonshire and about the parlour-maid at Fern Cottage.

"They are all wondering why Guy married me," she told herself.

Her share in the conversation soon became monosyllabic, and to avoid the awkwardness of long silences the others were forced to talk of books, and people and current affairs.

Sabina listened to this conversation with dismay ; there was so much for her to learn. She felt she would never be able to take part. These people were all too clever for her.

She was relieved when someone proposed that Guy should play.

"What shall it be," said Guy to the company at large.

"Debussy," said Powicke.

Guy played the "Children's Corner."

Then somebody asked Marian to play.

"Oh she, too, can play," said Sabina to herself.

She saw that Guy warmly approved of her playing ; and, when somebody suggested that they should play together, a pain like the pain she had felt when the woman at Lynmouth had looked at Guy over the rim of her glass, suddenly surprised her.

Instinctively, as they played, she divined the

intimacy of feeling expressed in their performance. She watched in a fascinated way the four hands moving rhythmically upon the keys ; and once, when their hands touched and parted on the notes, she felt a curious hot flush of anger. She waited for it to happen again, watching the near approach of the two middle hands with a pang of physical jealousy which wavered like hot iron under a bellows.

She expected, when the music was finished, that they would say something, or look at one another in a way declaring an intimacy from which she was excluded. To her surprise, however, Marian rose abruptly, shut the piano with a snap, and said she must be going.

Marian remembered a previous occasion when Guy and she had played together in that room. Guy remembered it too, and, after looking at Marian for a moment rather like a child unexpectedly rebuked, turned away from her in a cloud. This was not lost upon Sabina.

§ 4

Marian's signal for departure broke up the evening.

Sabina would say nothing about what had passed except that she liked Guy's brother very much. But, when the light was out and they lay together in their room, she began to talk. She would often do this. It was easier to say things just in that way. Guy heard her voice coming as though from nowhere, with just that suspicion of a dialect (fainter now than when first he had met her) which

he had almost come to love in their close times, but which had begun to torment him, because it tormented her, when there were other people present.

"Why do you love me, Guy?" he heard her say.

"How can I tell you that?" he responded.

"I'm sometimes the most hateful creature," she said.

"Those people to-night," she went on, after a pause.

"They were trying to be kind and I detested them, and when you were playing with your cousin——"

"Say Marian, dear."

"I will never say Marian," said Sabina.

"When you were playing with her," she continued, "I was jealous. It hurts horribly to be jealous, but I can't help it."

There was a silence.

"I hoped you would be happy to-night," said Guy later on. "Theodore likes you tremendously, and you are going to be great friends."

They talked of Theodore for a while. Guy told her all he could about his brother; and, when they at last went to sleep, both were a little reassured by the thought of him.

§ 5

Meanwhile Theodore was smoking a pipe in his rooms at the Temple. Haunted by the sensitive prettiness of his brother's wife, he wondered what he would do with her if she belonged to him. Theodore naturally thought of people as belonging

to other people. The girl could not be much more than nineteen.

He decided that he would probably have sent her to school. Her inflamed sensitiveness could only be overcome by allowing her gradually to discover that the clever people were not half so clever as they seemed. In about two years she would learn that what most people know can be very easily mastered. Theodore decided that he would put the idea to Sabina himself. Guy would certainly make a mess of it.

Theodore turned from thinking of his brother to look a little sardonically at himself. He sometimes felt savage with himself for being a careful man.

"I shall not marry till I'm thirty-five," he reflected. "Unless I can marry with advantage," he added with a sidelong smile, half whimsical and half serious. "Or unless——"

He paused upon a thought which had struck him. Marian was free now, and there was no reason why he should not try for her. Half Marian was better than no Marian at all.

But why with him should it be always half, whereas with Guy it was usually more than the whole. And again, in thinking of Guy by the sea with the girl whose face was so like a flower, and who seemed alive to things in a way which shadowed even Marian, he felt once more that twinge of envy which was sometimes part of his affection, and always a part of his anger, when faced with a crisis in his brother's destiny.

CHAPTER IV

§ I

GUY was unable to find a house in Hampstead immediately. Meanwhile he stayed with Sabina in his old rooms. These were unhappy weeks for them both, but especially for Sabina. No worse arrangement could have been made than one which left her for long hours, while Guy was about his business, with nothing to do but to struggle with books which at every turn convicted her of a deeper ignorance ; to wait and brood over her shortcomings ; or to sit apprehensive and resentful with Aunt Helen or Marian and their friends, vainly trying to find a common ground on which to meet. The position was all the worse owing to a pretence which both maintained that their love was sufficient in itself. Guy came home assuming that he would find her gloriously happy, and Sabina greeted him as though she were happy too. They told themselves in long walks during the evening, during their intimate little suppers together, and in their whispered conversations at night, that they were the happiest creatures alive. Sometimes they believed it. At all times they tried to believe it.

It was a relief for Sabina sometimes to attend concerts or the Opera with Guy, though the music wearied her and often she could hardly endure the endless succession of sounds which for her had no

reason or rhyme. But she liked to dine at some little restaurant in Soho, and to walk on Guy's arm through the streets in the spring air, when the buildings of the city glimmered as though with their own light, and the lamps shone under a sky still as luminous as they. At these times she was gay ; and, looking with fresh eyes upon the people and incidents of the street, would amuse Guy with quaint comments and unexpected analogies. At these moments Guy had an intimate pride in her.

" Why can't she be like this with Marian and the others ? " he would think.

After the music she rarely recovered her gaiety until they had got home, and she could forget that the performance which had meant so much to Guy had for her been incomprehensible and wearisome. They had supper, with hot coffee ; and, all the world being gone to bed, they would sometimes scramble about the Heath together. They usually passed Fern Cottage on these occasions. Sabina felt strangely exultant as they did so. She was so much alive, and the blank house seemed so obviously extinguished. She liked to walk under Marian's window with the restraint of Guy's arm about her. She even gloried in what she conceived to be the vulgarity of walking like this in the street.

" *She* would never do anything so common," Sabina thought as they passed. " But how she would miss it, if she only knew."

This was her revenge for the Hampstead parties, in which she experienced again, more poignantly, the miseries of the evening when first she had met

Theodore, and Marian had joined them. These parties were becoming a nightmare. The talk confused her mind and even shocked her by its impious freedoms. On one of these occasions Théodore had rescued her from a Newnham girl in a state of horror and amazement. More often she felt simply stupid, and thought that nobody else had ever been so stupid in the world before. She would sit silently pretending to be interested in her food, smiling an occasional fixed smile, unable to contribute a word, and dreading to be drawn into the conversation.

It was while walking home from one of these Hampstead parties that Theodore first referred to his plan for alleviating an impossible position which was rapidly growing worse. Sabina that evening, after a few shy endeavours to participate, had remained sullenly silent, and had rejected every effort to include her. She had made up her mind that she would never come out to dinner again.

Guy was walking a little in advance, vivaciously attended by a bevy of which the Newnham girl was the most conspicuous member. Theodore was walking behind with Sabina. He watched her face as she stared at the party ahead of them. Suddenly he took her by the arm.

"In the dumps?" he enquired, looking absurdly like a father.

"I'm no good," said Sabina tragically. "I sometimes wish I was dead," she added, with a wicked vehemence.

,' Stuff,' said Theodore.

,' Stuff is one of Guy's words,' said Sabina, with

a hysterical laugh. "But you're not a bit like Guy," she added after a pause. "Not really."

"How old are you?" said Theodore, with apparent irrelevance.

"Twenty next July," said Sabina. "Why do you ask?"

"I was wondering what I should do with you if I were your father," said Theodore.

Sabina looked at him in faint surprise. "What would you do?" she inquired.

"Well, to begin with," said Theodore, "I should send you to school."

"But I'm grown up."

"So am I," said Theodore. "But I'm still at school."

"Now you *are* like Guy," said Sabina. "You're making fun."

"I'm not making fun," said Theodore, seriously. "I'm at school learning to be a lawyer. Guy and I were both of us at school less than a year ago. That girl in front," he said, indicating the Newnham girl, "is still at school."

"Thank you," said Sabina. "I'm not in love with *her*. Besides, I'm married."

"No need to tell the other girls," said Theodore.

They walked on a few steps. At last Sabina said, "Is this a notion you've got, or-are you just trying it on?"

"It's a notion," said Theodore.

"I see," said Sabina, darkly. "I'm not good enough."

Theodore pressed her arm as they walked.

"You left school long before you ought to have

done," he said. "We must make it up to you somehow. In two years you could know as much as any of us, and you would discover how easy it is to talk to people and be just yourself."

Sabina turned to him curiously.

Suddenly she asked, in sharp suspicion: "Has Guy been putting you up to this?"

"It's my own idea entirely," said Theodore.

At this point the others called them up for a general exchange of valedictions.

§ 2

That night Sabina spoke of Theodore's plan while she was combing her hair. Her face was turned from Guy, who was in bed reading a music score. He was out of spirits owing to Sabina's unhappiness at the party, which had been her worst failure.

He had expected their day would end as it often ended now. They frequently had to face such evenings as this. They would pretend that nothing had happened to trouble them; but each would be conscious that the other had thoughts and feelings unconfessed and even denied. Each would lie awhile, finding comfort superficial and imperfect in the near presence of the other; and then, with an obscure resentment against the trouble which came between them, they would sleep upon a problem evaded and a disappointment unadmitted.

With these occasions, when all was ignored, there alternated crises of emotion. To-night, when Sabina called to Guy from where she sat at the dressing table, he put down his score with a sinking

heart. He saw the old scene re-enacted. He would plead and argue with Sabina, and gradually he would prevail. Then she would be reconciled, and they would invoke passion to cover and to heal them. He saw all this in advance, and his prevision gave it an air absurdly and monotonously automatic.

He was surprised when she simply told him of Theodore's suggestion that she should go to school.

"At first," she said, "I thought he was making fun; but he really meant it."

Guy thought a moment.

"It's an idea," he said at last. "But it wants thinking about."

"Theodore thought about it," said Sabina.

"Good for Theodore," said Guy.

The idea was already taking root in him. He wondered at what sort of school she could possibly get what she wanted without being subjected to exactly the same difficulties she encountered at the Hampstead parties.

"It depends on the school," he said guardedly.

"Theodore will find a school," said Sabina.

She said it like a child who has found the kind of uncle who is a wonder because he only comes to the house occasionally.

Guy had an absurd picture of her sitting on a form, learning the dates of the kings of England as a preparation for encounters with the Newnham girl. The imp in him looked at the picture, and smiled; but the imp was not all. He saw the girl who was his wife, happy and yet unhappy, twisting her hair in little knots of blue tissue paper. She

turned to him with the knots lying above her ears and the two long plaits falling across her breast. The imp was silenced, and the pity of it gripped him viciously. The sudden meeting of the two impulses was too much for his self-control. He held out his hand to her. She came to him, wondering at the sudden brightening in his eyes and the hard clasp of his fingers ; and, when he suddenly dipped his face to her knees and avoided her looks, she felt his cheeks and found they were wet. It was the first time Sabina had ever really conceived that Guy might be as much in need of comfort as she. She looked down at him with a strange pleasure. She could say nothing, but simply let him lie, till, without looking at her, he said : " Sabina, dear, if only I could make you really happy."

" I'm often a beast to you," said Sabina, with a deeper relevance than was apparent.

They declared their love in the dearest words they could find ; and, when the moment had passed, Guy reverted almost breezily to Theodore's plan. They talked about it for a long while, and for the first time during many weeks they slept with a quiet relief in their hearts. In one moment of direct and declared feeling they had relaxed the strain of emotions long ignored or denied expression.

CHAPTER V

§ I

THEODORE shortly announced that he had found a school. It was in Cheltenham, and it was decided that Sabina should go there after the summer holidays. Meanwhile they remained in the Hampstead rooms, and Sabina prepared her trunk for departure. Theodore overruled Guy's fears that she would be lonely or out of countenance. He had carefully chosen the school, and had arranged for a special treatment of Sabina's case. The girls were of a class which would not be at all formidable for Sabina after her experience at Hampstead, and the Principal had undertaken to look after her personally.

The life at Hampstead remained much the same, except that Sabina went to no more parties and saw as little as possible of Marian and Aunt Helen. Guy began a book on contemporary composers which kept him busy at home. On the whole this was a happy interval. The threat of separation softened their relationship, and the hopeful adventure in preparation lightened their hearts. Theodore was a frequent visitor, and often brought odd things for the trunk. The trunk became an institution. Guy and Sabina and Theodore would stand outside Peter Robinson's or Selfridge's, and one of them would say : " That would be rather a

nice thing for the trunk, don't you think?" Then they would go in. Guy would choose something, and Theodore, when Guy had run short of small change, which frequently happened, would pay for it.

In due time the trunk was packed and Sabina went from Paddington, on a sunny day in September. Guy and Theodore were both in attendance. They went away with a memory of her sitting back in a corner seat (the trunk was safely in the van), smiling wistfully as they stood by the door, and for the tenth time told her of the trap that was to meet her and the amount of money she was to give the porter at the other end.

§ 2

As soon as Sabina had left London, Guy moved into a cottage on the borders of Sussex. Powicke had told him of the cottage, which was on the estate of his father, Lord Melsham, not far from Tunbridge Wells. Guy could have it for nothing as long as he liked, and the woodcutter's wife further up the lane would look after him. The quiet of the place was just what he needed. London could be reached in two hours. The cottage, which was called Brambletye, was not far from Old Place, Lord Melsham's country seat.

Theodore, in the intervals of reading for the Bar, had accepted the post of secretary to Lord Melsham, and in this capacity began to frequent Old Place soon after Guy had taken up his quarters at Brambletye. It was four miles to Old Place by road; but there was an alternative path which

ran through the woods, and divided the journey by three.

Brambletye was a pleasant cottage, timbered and built in the old Kentish fashion with a high tiled roof. But it was dark, and, as the nights became chilly, it was cold. It lay with a stretch of garden separating it from the road. The road ran along the side of a hill, and was higher than the cottage, so that a person standing by the road gate could look in at the attic windows. The trees further up the hill cut off the light. Looking from the front of the cottage towards the rise of the hill one could imagine that the big trees were marching down, and might kick the cottage over the treetops which spread from the back of it still further down the slope.

The road above the cottage was the road by which Theodore arrived in Lord Melsham's car when he came to Old Place. Theodore often passed in the late evening and saw the light in his brother's window. Always he would stop and talk, and often he would take Guy along with him to dinner.

Guy was now deeply engaged in the book, which he hoped would make some stir among the musicians; and he was doing continually more work for Henderson, though there were many things of which Henderson did not approve.

One thing, especially, Henderson did not like. He understood from his cashier that Guy was inclined to press for his salary before the long delays incident to the payment of remuneration for literary services had altogether run their

course. This was incompatible with the dignity of a member of the staff.

Guy could never understand how he contrived to spend his money. He could not see that he spent anything at all. He lived by himself frugally in a cottage for which he paid no rent. Sabina's school fees had been paid in advance by Theodore, because Theodore happened to be arranging the affair. Guy had made a note of the amount on the back of an envelope, which he had lost. He had also made a similar note of a debt to Aunt Helen. These obligations would be quite easily met when he got the next big lump sum. Meanwhile incidental expenses actively carried off all the little lump sums which he received from day to day, and the big lump sums had a way of delaying their appearance until they had become heavily embarrassed with charges each of which claimed priority over all the others.

Among the incidental expenses was Mrs. Basing, of the "Three Foresters." In the chill nights of November Guy would put down his pen, and go to the cheerful public-house half a mile away at the cross roads. There he would drink ale; and Mrs. Basing, having drawn the ale with her own jewelled hands, would take a glass of port or a whisky and soda at Guy's expense. Mrs. Basing had a broad vein of pleasantry which appealed to Guy. Ten years ago she was beautiful. To-day she was as handsome as the dentist would allow, and she had a presence the aspect of which upon chilly nights was comforting. When the farmers of the district went to London they brought her

chocolates and cigarettes. She amused them up to a point, and then she reminded them that they were married men. And everybody liked her.

§ 3

Guy was not unhappy in the temporary recovery of his singleness. He liked to kick about in the large tester bed of the attic; to read books by guttering candle light far into the night; to rise now and then and put his head out of the window and smell the damp earth, or see what beast it was crunching bones under the wall. He liked the evenings at the "Three Foresters." He liked Mrs. Basing with her finger rings and her broad jests, her astonishing capacity for whiskies and sodas, and her unfailing readiness amid the give-and-take of the bar parlour. He liked his occasional visits to Old Place, where he could enjoy a civilised dinner all the better for its contrast with his own frugal and rustic life. He liked his visits to London and his occasional nights of tobacco and talk with Powicke in the Hampstead rooms. He liked his long hours of writing or meditation in the cottage, so quiet that he could hear every creature that passed in the woods. He liked to be up in the dark mornings, kindling a wood fire, pottering with the breakfast and frying rashers of ham. He liked his occasional rides on Lord Melsham's horses, and the night calls of his brother in the large motor-car.

He missed Sabina, but Sabina would return. He wrote to her almost every day, describing his life, and he looked eagerly for her letters.

Her first letter was the longest she ever wrote :—

My dearest,

I arrived here safely and am quite comfortable. My room is very small but it is a nice room. The girls are nice, but, Guy, dear, I don't think they are really the sort you want me to be like. Miss Pimbury says I shall not be with the girls for long. She is going to make me a kind of companion.

Really, I'm not much with the girls. Miss Pimbury looks after me quite a lot. I think the girls are so funny when they talk about boys. They often talk about boys, and I feel such a fraud being married. I feel I could tell them such lots, but I only listen. They think I'm very green sometimes.

It sometimes seems too funny being here after what we have done. I do miss you so much. I cried a little last night.

I suppose you're surprised I haven't written before. But, Guy, I can't write letters. I never seem to have a word to say except that I want you all the time. I don't think I should like the cottage very much. I hate the country, really, unless it is by the sea ; and with all those trees I am sure I should feel pokey. You know how I hate the trees. Fancy you cooking your own breakfast.

I am learning quite a lot, though Miss Pimbury doesn't bother me much about that. She says the best way to learn is to talk to people, and she talks to me quite a lot. She came and sat on my bed last night. She looked very funny. She had on a bright pink dressing gown and a night cap with lace edging. She talked about a man called Ruskin. Do you know anything about him, Guy? I like Miss Pimbury awfully. I've told her how ignorant I am. She says

it doesn't matter if only I can forget it. She tucked me up last night and said it was a shame. I can't make her out sometimes.

I wish I could kiss you good night, Guy, but then it wouldn't be good night, would it? I hope you won't be angry because I haven't written before, but writing seems no good when you've nothing to say. But you must write to me even if I don't write to you. I am so excited when I have a letter, that I can hardly wait to read it, even when I'm with the girls. They want to know who my young man is, and think I'm close because I won't tell. Isn't it funny, Guy?

Now I must stop, Give my love to Theodore, and tell him that Miss Pimbury liked him very much when he came to see her.

Your own,

SABINA.

In December the cottage was dark in the late afternoon, and the long evenings were apt to be over-long. Often, when the cottage became oppressive, he would walk through the wet woods to Old Place, where at the door he would be greeted with light and warmth, and immediate assurances of bright company and good food. Henderson was sometimes there, and once he encountered Marian, whom Theodore had introduced to Lord Melsham with the happiest results. Marian was at Old Place for only one week-end. She played the piano with Guy by request, and they kept each other well in countenance at the dinner-table. But Marian avoided all intimacy with Guy, who felt that the life had gone out of their friendship. He resented it, and obscurely pressed her for signs that nothing had altered for the worse; but she

baffled him by her very friendliness. She asked continually after his work, and met him halfway on all the topics that he raised.

§ 4

One evening Guy was playing on the piano in the cottage by the light of two candles in the piano brackets (he had hired the piano in Tunbridge) when he heard Lord Melsham's car outside. The car stopped, and Guy went to the gate. The night was dark, and the bare trees were only a little blacker than the sky in the small open space between the cottage and the road. Shading his eyes from the glare of the car headlights, Guy walked up the path. Theodore called to know if he were there. He called back in the affirmative, and hoped loudly and cheerfully that Theodore would take him on to dancing and delight. He reached the gate and leant over.

"Guy," said Theodore from the car, "I've brought somebody to see you."

"It's dark for seeing," said Guy.

Theodore swung himself out of the car and turned to help someone to alight.

A moment later Sabina stood upon the road between them.

On his way to the gate Guy had savoured all the pleasant associations of the big car and had enjoyed in advance the quick dash to the warmth and light of the house. The sudden sight of Sabina struck out these comfortable visions. In their place he felt a sharp anxiety and a sense that his responsibilities had returned.

"Sabina, dear, what on earth has happened?"

She put out her hand to him and it touched his sleeve in the dark.

"Aren't you glad to see me, Guy?" she asked.

"Give him time," said Theodore cheerfully.

"You've surprised him out of his life. I picked her up at the station," he added for Guy's information.

Theodore's speech gave Guy time to feel the effect of a little tremor in her voice when she asked him if he were glad.

"Am I glad indeed?" he exclaimed.

"We've got a bag in the car," said Theodore, diving back into the limousine. He deposited the bag in the road.

"How are you off for stores, Guy?" he enquired.

"Have you any sort of fatted calf? Or shall I send you some stuff down from the house?"

"I've got enough," said Guy.

Sabina was hanging on Guy's arm with one hand. Theodore squeezed the other briefly and got into the car. The chauffeur drove rapidly off, and the the lamps, suddenly swinging round the bend of the road, left them in darkness, lit only by two twinkling points of light in the cottage room.

Guy, turning away from visions of an excellent dinner and much cheerful conversation over the port, and (for usually now he stayed the night) a comfortable retirement to bed cheered by a crackling fire upon the bedroom hearth, looked at the glimmering figure by his side.

"I hope I haven't frightened you, coming like this," said Sabina.

"What is it, dear?" Guy asked. "What has happened?"

She did not answer him, but shivered slightly.

"Come into the cottage," said Guy, "and I will light a fire ; I hadn't lit one for myself this evening ; but I'll soon get it going."

He took up the bag and they went down the path into the cottage. Guy shut and barred the door and lit the lamp. Then he came to Sabina.

"Let's have a look at you," he said.

She looked pale and tired. He kissed her, and she clung to him a moment. Then he put her into a chair and took off her hat for her. He wrapped her up in a rug and told her to sit still while he lit the fire. She sat silently watching him as he kindled the wood and piled on the coals. In a few moments the room looked more cheerful.

"Are you really glad to have me back?" she asked, as he returned from the scullery wiping his hands.

"Of course I'm glad," said Guy. "I'm just getting used to it."

He sat on the edge of her chair, finishing himself off with the towel.

"You're looking tired," he said. "Don't talk, but just let me get the supper. I'm very good at housework."

She watched him as he produced a cloth and laid the table. Her eyes followed him to and fro as he boiled milk and eggs and fetched honey and butter from the pantry. How kind he was ! And yet her welcome was not exactly what she had desired. She had hoped for a sudden outburst of delighted astonishment, but perhaps that was unreasonable. He was naturally anxious to know

what had happened, and yet he gave her all the time she needed in which to tell him. At one time she had feared he might be angry.

He came to her at last, and, putting his arm round her shoulders, invited her to supper. The fire was blazing, and Guy lit some extra candles. The small room looked comfortable now, and Sabina, who was really hungry, removed her coat and came to the table.

Guy described his life in the cottage, and talked generally at random, stifling the question which arose continually. Why had Sabina returned? He divined that she wanted to choose her time in which to speak.

When supper was finished, Guy drew an old horse-hair sofa before the fire, and they sat together warming themselves.

At last Guy said : " Won't you tell me now why you've come home ? "

She did not answer.

" Homesick ? " Guy enquired.

" A little," said Sabina. " But it's not that," she added almost at once.

" Tell me," Guy insisted.

She looked at him as though she were pleading to be spared the need to say something.

" Can't you guess, Guy ? " she asked.

There was something unusual in her eyes which startled him for a moment. " Are you ill ? " he enquired.

" No, Guy, I'm not ill, not really." Then, after a silence, she added without looking at him : " Guy, I'm going to have a baby."

§ 5

Both realised that this should have been a great moment in their lives. Sabina looked up, and their eyes met in a mutual enquiry. The enquiry was answered almost before it was read. The great moment had passed them by. It had come too soon, and they were both too young and unprepared. It came almost as a misadventure. They had not allowed for it. It destroyed a plan carefully laid and only just beginning to mature. There was even an absurd side to it. Sabina, who had pretended to be a schoolgirl, was about to be a mother. There was further, for Guy, involuntarily the sense of an immense addition to his responsibilities. The conspiracy had thickened which seemed determined to make him old before he had been young. For Sabina it had already meant a flight precipitate and unexplained from her school, and a secret fear that Guy would not be pleased. For a while they were silent. Then in Guy there prevailed a feeling that more than ever was Sabina to be helped and cherished. After her quick glance of enquiry towards him she looked away and remained with her eyes downcast. Guy had even more vividly than ever a sense of her girlishness. She was too young to be a mother. The compassion, which had hurried him into his marriage, sprang alive in him once more. He lost his feeling of bewilderment and revolt; and, when next she looked at him, she saw in him all the tenderness she desired.

They sat together for a long while talking of the time they had spent apart, and a little, now and then, of the event to come. But of this they were as yet shy. They came to it unwillingly and after

long diversions. Sabina could say little about it, except that she desired to be cared for more than ever before, and Guy could only assure her that he had never more dearly loved her.

CHAPTER VI

§ I

SOME six weeks after Sabina returned from school she sat with Guy in the living room of the cottage discussing a note which had come that morning from Old Place. They had finished their tea, and were enjoying the last of the fire.

Guy had by this time got used to the idea that he was shortly to be a father. They had often talked of it, often with curiosity, sometimes with excitement, and occasionally with a quaint sense of the fun it would be to have a baby of their own. Sabina listened mostly, and it was Guy who talked. So far she had failed to feel the event very deeply except as it affected her relationship with Guy. When she thought of it as a link between them, she rejoiced; but there were times when she regarded it as an intrusion for which they were not yet ripe, and which might further complicate their problem. She could not put this feeling into words, but, more than ever, she craved for Guy continually to express his affection.

Guy was trying to persuade her to come with him that evening to Old Place. The note they were discussing was an invitation to dinner from Lady Melsham; and, for the third time that day, Sabina said she would not go. She had stubbornly refused to go to Old Place in spite of frequent

invitations and a personal call from Lady Melsham.

"*You* must go, Guy," she said, "but I should be frightened to death. Besides, I've got nothing to wear," she added.

She tried not to feel bitter about it. Guy had been very kind to her during the last few weeks. He had made unfailing fun of their country hardships; he had waited on her continually; his absences in town had been short and few. No one had come between them. They had lived happily by themselves, seeing only the woman who came to work for them, and Theodore as he passed occasionally in the car.

When the evening came, and Guy was putting on the clothes which somehow always made him something of a stranger, Sabina watched him with an occasional bitter sense of neglect. She didn't want to go, but she wished he had not so easily agreed that she should remain at home. She tied his white bow for him, and buttoned his cheerful waistcoat by the light of a flickering candle, and pitied herself because she had to send him away to the warmth and jollity which she had refused to share with him.

"Have a good time, dear," she said, from the gate, as Guy prepared to walk off along the frosty road.

"No doubt about the good time!" Guy gaily answered.

Already he tasted the delights of civilised intercourse after his prolonged hibernation.

He need not have been so awfully pleased about it, thought Sabina, as she turned away.

Then she saw him coming back to her. Something forlorn in the figure at the gate had struck across his joyous anticipation.

"I wish you were coming, too," he said.

"It's my own fault, Guy."

"Don't be lonely," he helpfully advised her.

"I shan't have time to be lonely," she said.

"There's the washing up, and my skirt which has to be altered."

"Altered?"

"Yes," said Sabina resentfully, "it's getting tighter every day."

Guy assured her that he would not be late.

"Don't bother about me," said Sabina.

He kissed her good-night, and told her to go early to bed.

§ 2

About half an hour later, Sabina, surprised by an unexpected illumination, saw that Lord Melsham's car was at the gate. As she went up the path Theodore put his head out and asked whether she and Guy were ready. She said briefly that Guy was walking to Old Place, and that she was not feeling well enough to come. Theodore expressed concern, and argued with her for a while; and someone else, whom she could not see, added some further kind inquiries. Sabina, with a pang, recognised the voice of Marian. Theodore switched on the light inside the car. Sabina saw Marian leaning forward, wonderfully elegant, and found herself ungraciously responding to friendly advances. She knew that Marian was trying to discover whether Guy had left her quite alone at

the cottage. She was moved to pretend that she was accompanied that night by the woodcutter's wife. Marian's anxiety seemed somehow to reflect upon Guy. Such impertinence could not be tolerated.

During the next hour Sabina brooded continually upon Guy among his distinguished friends. "I'd like to see him among them all," she thought.

The idea grew upon her as she ate her supper. The notion came to her first as a spasm of curiosity, touched with the jealousy to which she was so easily moved. But, as the evening wore on, and she finished the small tasks she had set herself, there grew upon her an unusual nervousness, and a desire, different from anything she had felt before, for Guy's company. She had a fear of something which seemed about to happen: a need of protection and human companionship. She did not want to be surprised by this lurking fate in the lonely cottage. The thought of the big house, and the warmth and company in which she would find Guy, became an obsession. She didn't want to be there, full in the light, but to be near at hand.

A little later she began almost mechanically to put on a warm coat and some wraps. She left the cottage and took the path which led to Old Place by way of the woods. Soon she almost repented of her vague design. It was bright moonlight, and, though the path was distinct, the shapes of the trees were terrifying and the darker spaces were caverns of fear. But she was urged forward by curious hysterical visions in which Guy appeared surrounded by companies of fair women, oblivious

of her and of all the sickness and anxiety with which she had been struggling during the last months ; and he was far away from her — very far away, and at all costs to be reached. With this urgent impulse towards Guy was mingled a sharper uneasiness than she had ever felt before concerning the unborn child she carried.

In one of the open glades to be crossed stood a large beech whose smooth trunk stood white in the moon. There was something ghostly in its attitude. As she passed beside it, Sabina shuddered, for, with its stretched arms, it seemed alive, and she half expected it to step across her path and embrace her with its shining and smooth limbs. She gave a cry as a bramble tugged at her dress and brought her to her knees. It seemed as though the tree had caught her.

Her heart was beating violently as she came out into the full moonlight and stood looking at the house.

From where she stood she could see that certain windows which gave upon the terrace were lighted.

The curtains were drawn, but at one of the windows they did not meet, and she could see figures passing to and fro behind them. All was quiet in the garden and on the terrace itself.

Half to escape the wood, which lay cold and threatening behind her, and half to satisfy her growing curiosity, she slipped over the lawn and mounted the terrace. She went to the window and looked in, supporting herself as she leant forward by holding on to the rim of a large stone vase containing evergreens. From a gap in the

curtains she saw that the guests were taking dessert. Her eyes were held for a moment by the small details which to her were novel and unexpected, the little silver lamp beside Lord Melsham for lighting cigarettes, the rose petals floating in the finger-bowls, the lace mats on the polished table in which the glass and silver mirrored themselves. She noted that the table was lit with real candles, and that the rest of the room was in shadow except where a hidden frieze of lights threw soft gleams upon the ceiling, or where the surface of one or two old pictures was especially illuminated from small brackets which flung their rays on to the canvas.

And then she saw Guy. He was talking vivaciously to a girl in white. Sabina noted with resentment that the girl could talk, and that Guy was amused. She noticed with satisfaction that the girl was plain. Theodore she perceived at the end of the table on the right of a stately lady in black silk with a string of pearls round her neck. That must be Lady Melsham. Marian was at the opposite end on the right of Lord Melsham.

A gust of wind came up from the wood—a whimper which grew and spread as it neared the terrace. Sabina turned defensively towards the sound. It seemed to have in it something of the malevolent life of the naked beech which, she imagined, had caught at her as she passed. She had a poignant sense of insecurity, standing between the hostility of the blind trees and of the house from which she was excluded. She waited for the sound

to die away, and then turned again to the window. She saw that the ladies had risen and were about to withdraw from the room ; but she barely had time to see what was happening when again a sound was formed in the wood. As it grew louder she bade herself be firm and disregard it. The feeling grew almost to anguish that something was stealing up from the wood behind her. She felt its breath on the nape of her neck. Trembling violently, she turned at last, and seemed to see the whole of the wood move under her eyes. At the same time, she felt under her heart a stir and flutter as of something alive. The wood swayed a moment and hesitated, and then suddenly it was marching towards her, growing bigger and blacker as it came. At last it blotted out the view and closed upon her. She had a sense of falling and of being engulfed, the smell of earth and green leaves testifying to the fact that the trees had got her at last.

§ 3

Within the house, Marian was passing a window on her way to the dining room door, when she heard a crash outside. She caught up the curtain and saw that a woman had fainted, pulling down upon herself a large stone vase which had been shattered and had thrown its contents all about her. She hurried after Lady Melsham. Her quick mind leapt at the identity of the woman, and her first impulse was to save the position for Guy. Sabina had been left alone, and the poor girl had come to see what he was doing. Guy would be made ridiculous. Something might even be said of the

callousness of leaving a young wife alone and without help at a time when she needed special care.

She caught Lady Melsham, and whispered urgently what she had seen and what she expected.

Issuing orders as she passed, Lady Melsham hurried with Marian from the dining room.

§ 4

Sabina recovered under Marian's eyes and in Marian's room at Old Place. People were busy about her. Her dress had been loosened and she felt deathly cold. On seeing Marian, she instinctively closed her eyes, and, realising what had happened, groped for an explanation of her presence on the terrace where they must have found her. This explanation, however, could wait. She must lie still for a little while, till her body was warm again and she had been a little restored by the comfort and security of this pleasant room. Soon she would tell them that she had been for a walk in the wood and had lost her way. She had come upon the house by chance, and was about to call. That was the right story. Of course, she was coming to call. Why shouldn't she call at Old Place? It was, she seemed to remember, rather late for a call. She remembered how, when someone had come to Fern Cottage at six o'clock in the afternoon, Aunt Helen had said that six o'clock was late.

She wondered if Marian had been part of her hallucination when she had fainted. She opened her eyes again.

Someone with a kind voice was talking about her.

"This fainting," said the voice, "is not at all unusual."

"I suppose she ought not to have been left alone?"

She recognised Marian's voice.

"How was the boy to know? They are both of them too young to know anything at all. Has she any married women friends?"

"She has no friends," said Marian. "I did my best."

Sabina's lids fluttered, and she knew, though she did not see, that the woman with the kind voice was cautioning Marian to be silent. She opened her eyes wide and asked where she was, because she thought that that was the usual thing to say on recovering from a faint.

Marian bent over her.

"You're in my room, Sabina, in Lady Melsham's house. Did you lose your way in the wood?"

Sabina stared at her, and under her dark eyes Marian flinched.

"Yes," said Sabina at last. "I lost my way in the wood."

Instinctively they understood one another. Marian had desired to offer an excuse for Sabina's presence which would save Guy any unnecessary humiliation. Sabina was willingly her accomplice, even as she wondered at the revelation here offered of Marian's solicitude. Sabina accepted the excuse. Guy should not be exposed to ridicule or reproach as a man whose wife came to spy at him through a crack in the curtains. But what right had Marian to concern herself in this? Sabina re-

membered a look she had stolen at Guy over the dinner table as she had watched her through the window : and there, facing her on the little table beside Marian's bed, was Guy's photograph.

All this passed in a moment, and, in the moment that followed, Marian was indicating Lady Melsham.

"Don't try to talk to us, child," said Lady Melsham. "You must stay here for the night. I am having a room made ready, and Guy shall come to you."

"Can't I go home?" said Sabina.

"Out of the question to-night," said Lady Melsham. "My maid shall put you to bed."

Sabina's eyes widened with apprehension. How is one put to bed by a maid? She would die of confusion.

"I'd rather go home," she said.

"I couldn't possibly allow that," said Lady Melsham firmly.

A trim young person in a lace apron came into the room.

"I think we might move her now."

Sabina submitted without another word. Marian and Lady Melsham watched the transfer, asked her how she felt, and were busily kind. On leaving, Lady Melsham told her to send word if she desired anything.

Sabina, alone with the maid, lost no time in demonstrating that she was well enough to attend to herself; and the maid, who was a person of discretion, suggested that madam would perhaps ring if she required any assistance, and that, in the

meantime, some hot arrowroot would be prepared in the kitchen. Sabina, left to herself, undressed and went rapidly to bed.

Guy, on coming into the drawing-room after a long session over the port, was quietly informed by Lady Melsham that his wife was upstairs. Lady Melsham conducted him to the room, telling him on the way that Sabina, walking in the wood, had fainted, fortunately near enough to the house to be immediately discovered. She told him not to worry too much about it. It was an entirely natural thing for his wife to faint in the circumstances.

§ 5

Guy found Sabina propped on pillows, eating a basin of arrow-root. The mild light of the room spared the gauntness of her face ; her plaits hung down in the familiar way ; and her prettiness, to which Guy was not even yet accustomed, was accentuated by the daintiness in which she was embosomed.

Guy was not deceived by Sabina's casual promenade in the wood. As soon as he heard of her presence in the house, he knew what had happened. In his anxiety and compunction he spared only a fleeting thought for the way in which appearances had been saved.

He came straight towards her, and sat beside her on the bed. Sabina began to explain, but he checked her at once, and she saw that no explanation was needed. He had come to know her capacity for self-torment and to anticipate the impulses to which it occasionally drove her. To-

night he only felt that he had been cruel to leave her alone. He forbade her to talk, and sat with her, telling her things about the house and the people. Sabina submitted, and, overcome by a great weariness, lay among the pillows watching the fire, allowing herself to sink back, enjoying the comfort so abundantly found for her.

When Lady Melsham came to bring him down from the room, she found Guy watching his wife as one watches a child who has been put to sleep.

CHAPTER VII

§ 1

SOME four months later, in the late spring, Sabina's baby was born. Guy was beginning to realise that childbirth must be rather painful and to feel sick at heart as he sat in the room below, or wandered out of the cottage, when the doctor came down and announced that he had a son. Called to Sabina a little later, his revolt against the savage processes of nature was further stimulated by the sight of his young wife lying exanimate on the bed with haunted eyes, and lips which smiled only because there was at last a respite. He resented the anxiety of the nurse to put the baby into his arms, and her obvious expectation that he would be deeply stirred by the queer bundle she offered. It was Sabina he wanted to see, and he was not yet ready to respond to this other appeal. The nurse praised the baby, as an expert, while Sabina and Guy exchanged looks. Apparently it was a beautiful baby. But how was Guy to know that? He had never seen a new-born baby, and had no standard whereby to measure the perfection of his own. He could only feel at this moment that Sabina had suffered; see only that she had come back to him from some underworld of anguish and terror; and be struck to the heart with the air she had of being herself but a child, with her

hair plaited and her nerveless arms lying straight beside her. He wanted to tell the nurse to take the baby away and look after it till Sabina was really old enough to be a mother.

Then he noted that Sabina's eyes were on the baby, and he suddenly realised that somehow she had already begun to love this small creature which up to twenty-four hours ago she had thought about as an unexpected and disconcerting intruder into their lives. He looked at the baby himself.

"It's very pink," he said to the nurse.

"He's a beautiful colour," replied the nurse. She slightly stressed the personal pronoun.

"When will it open its eyes?" he asked nervously.

"Puppies take nine days," he added, unexpectedly.

He disliked the abominable woman who apparently expected him to forget that he had heard Sabina crying out in torment not an hour ago.

The nurse shut her lips and took back the child into her appreciative arms. Guy, released from his responsibilities as a father, turned to the bed and floated a moment in the dark eyes of the girl who lay there so quietly. She did not move when he bent to kiss her, but her eyes deepened and her smile widened under his lips. On leaving her he lifted her hand, heavy as a dead limb, to his cheek, and laid it back gently on the quilt.

Those few moments in the room with Sabina were a foretaste of the period of Sabina's recovery and restoration to normal life. For Guy, during these weeks, the birth of Raymond (as the baby

was named) was an event which derived importance from the fact that it had made Sabina suffer and had added to her care. He did not realise how quickly she herself forgot the suffering. On the other hand he soon perceived that she loved the baby, and was happy to observe that she found in it a distraction which relieved the strain of the first days of their marriage.

This distraction even enabled her for a few weeks to accept the advances of Marian, who visited her from Old Place and worshipped at the feet of a child so incredibly beautiful. Guy was strangely gratified by the uncommon praise bestowed upon his son, but his time had not yet come to feel like a father. He was mainly anxious that Sabina should not unduly sacrifice herself. He became expert in minor ministrations to the child in order that she might as far as possible be spared.

§ 2

Marian was often at Old Place, and, often when she was there, she came through the wood to Brambletye. Sometimes Theodore was with her, and on these occasions Sabina watched them curiously. She was abnormally sensitive to the slightest impressions where her love for Guy was involved, and she noted in Marian, when Theodore was present, the attitude of unconscious defence to be observed in women who begin to suspect they are loved, but have not yet faced the possibility of a declaration. Sabina, who had long perceived that Theodore loved Marian, felt that he would shortly declare himself, and she waited for the

event with an ungovernable desire that Marian would take him.

"But she won't," she told herself bitterly, "not while there's a chance of Guy."

Sabina felt obscurely that, as long as Guy lived, there was a chance for Marian, and that, if Marian refused Theodore, it would be because she was instinctively keeping herself free. Her refusal would be, as it were, a proclamation that she would wait all her life for Guy; and, who knows?—perhaps destiny was in this case on the side of the woman who waited.

Sabina's uneasiness in regard to Marian was more than a personal jealousy. It arose from her deep distrust of all the memories and influences that divided her from Guy. Because she could not hold him quietly and continually, she feared to lose him as soon as he ceased to surround her with proofs of his affection. If he were absent, she was losing him, and if he were present, she was losing him, unless she was actively troubling his peace. She did not really believe that he was in love with Marian. But Marian was part of that world outside, to which he escaped when the circle of her arms was broken.

Frequently, when summer had begun to thicken the shadows of the wood, Guy accompanied Marian back to Old Place. Sabina would on these occasions wait for him at the window of her room, wondering why each time was longer than the last. There were nights when he failed to return for several hours. His time to linger came when, after bidding Marian good-night, he found himself

drawing near to the cottage on his return. He could see Sabina's lighted window as he drew near. His steps fell more slowly, and soon he would come to a stand under the trees.

Instinctively he postponed a renewal of that sense of strain which he never ceased, in a greater or less degree, to feel in Sabina's company. He hesitated to resume a life which was too intense. His nerves sought rest out of her company, and the mild walks with Marian to Old Place gave just sufficient respite to make him crave for a further tranquillity. Entering Sabina's room, after these delays, he would at once be conscious of a strain renewed as she turned to him her eyes big with inquiry.

Guy's work in London during this period was intermittent. He went to town usually about twice a week. Often, when his work was done, and he could be of no help to Sabina in the cottage, he went to the Three Foresters ; and on more than one occasion he returned from the care of Mrs. Basing in abnormally good spirits. Sabina accompanied him once to the inn and was introduced. She promptly added Mrs. Basing to the number of persons she disliked ; and, when Guy came home in a cheerful mood, she was quick to suspect the bright lady with the finger-rings and the draughts which she so liberally dispensed.

§. 3

Upon a warm blue day towards the end of September Sabina was preparing tea in the cottage when Theodore appeared in the doorway. Sabina

asked in a whisper (for Raymond was asleep in a sheltered corner of the room) whether he were alone. He said he had come suddenly down from London. He had inquired for Marian at Old Place ; but he had been informed that she had left for the cottage.

"She isn't here," said Sabina.

"He's come to propose," she added to herself.

"She started over an hour ago," said Theodore.

"Perhaps she has missed her way in the wood."

"She ought to know it well enough," said Sabina.

She said this in the tone of one who makes an accusation, and Theodore looked at her a little curiously.

He entered the cottage and admired the sleeping Raymond. At the end of a quarter of an hour he pulled out his watch, and wondered again what had become of Marian. Sabina, with a hard smile, said she also was beginning to wonder where Marian could be and what had become of Guy.

"Perhaps they are under the great beech," she said, slanting a steady look at Theodore.

"Why under the great beech?" Theodore inquired.

"They're rather fond of it," said Sabina.

Sabina had jumped to the conclusion that Marian was with Guy in the wood. She saw them clairvoyantly sitting under the great beech, talking at ease, oblivious of the passing time. There was no reason why she should think of the great beech, except that she hated it, and that she had heard

them both praise it and the glade in which it stood. Theodore's appearance at the cottage, alone and looking for Marian, who, Sabina was sure, must even now be with Guy in the wood, was, to her sense of things, sufficiently dramatic to give edge to her sense that something was wrong. She seized her hat from a peg on the wall. Theodore saw that she was abnormally excited.

"We'll go and find them," she said, stabbing in a hat-pin. "Unless you'd rather not," she added cryptically.

Theodore followed her with misgivings. He felt that there was evil in her words. Her cryptic mood, in an intensely prevailing way, hung in the still dark spaces of the glade, till Theodore began to realise that even in sunlight it was possible to be haunted.

Suddenly she stopped in front of him and gripped his arm. With her other hand she pointed aside. Marian was sitting with Guy under the great beech. He was lying well back talking into the air. Sabina noted the comfort of his pose, and received a sharp impression of intimacy in the easy way he was addressing his companion. Theodore looked only at Marian. She was sitting quite still, her hat in her hand and her head against the smooth trunk of the tree. She was looking at Guy in a way that declared her secret to both the onlookers. Of the four who stood thus near to one another, only Guy was unconscious of the look.

Theodore's attention was called from Marian by a violent movement from Sabina.

Her fists were tight-clenched, and her whole body stiffened with the effort to control herself.

At this moment Guy, turning to suggest that it was time for tea, saw his brother on the path with Sabina.

He waved a cheerful greeting, and, pulling Marian to her feet, came unconcernedly to meet them.

CHAPTER VIII

§ I

DURING the walk back to the cottage, and the tea which followed, Guy wondered why his brother was so thoughtful. In Sabina he merely recognised one of her moods, without distinctly locating the source. He supposed it was because he was late for tea. The general constraint of the party was, fortunately, dispelled at an early stage by the awakening of Raymond

After tea Theodore and Marian walked back to Old Place. It was not altogether by chance that their conversation took a deeper turn as they came to the great beech. As Theodore's eye rested on the tree he recalled Marian's devoted contemplation of his brother, and noted the light imprint in the turf where they had rested.

Theodore had many times recurred in thought to the idea that, Guy being married, the way was now open for him to try for Marian. He was ready, if a great passion were denied him, to fall back upon the very real affection which she had for him, and a loyalty which would find practical happiness in the fulfilment of obligations voluntarily incurred. This afternoon he had come to Brambletye in the heat of a resolve to put everything to the touch. For a moment, when he saw his brother with Marian under the tree, he had

wavered, but afterwards his resolution was fortified. The incident stung him in retrospect. That Marian should love so forlornly a man who was stupidly unconscious, raised in him a strong impatience composed partly of the thought that this was an unfair stroke of destiny at the expense of his own devotion, and partly a jealousy for Marian herself, that she should be, as it were, one of fortune's suppliants. The position thus viewed was intolerable. He felt bound to challenge it.

Marian, as they stood level with the big tree, knew that the moment had come which she had begun to anticipate without quite knowing what she would do when it came. She had tried to imagine herself accepting Theodore's proposal. Would it not be wise to accept? That afternoon it seemed especially wise. She had been thoroughly aware of all that had passed in Sabina's mind, and, though Sabina had no cause for jealousy, Marian had asked herself whether, by her visits to the cottage, she was not making things worse for Guy and spoiling the chance these two yet had of coming completely together. She realised that she must abandon Guy entirely, unless Sabina could somehow be assured that there was no cause for jealousy. Guy would not understand her withdrawal, and he would hurt her abominably by his obtuseness. But she could not risk being a motive of discord between him and his wife.

By accepting Theodore she would reassure Sabina and definitely escape from the false position

in which she was becoming involved. Theodore could not have chosen a better hour.

Held by a common thought, they stopped beside the big tree and stood there for a moment silent. Marian did not move when Theodore took her hand. She had as yet no impulse either towards him or away. Theodore hardly dared to speak lest the hand should be suddenly reclaimed. He had taken it as a lover, and she allowed it to remain.

Then by the sweetness of what he had won he measured the value of the rest. She stood there adorable and not averse. The thought of all he desired struck him speechless, but Marian saw in his face all that he could not say.

She allowed herself to be drawn to him, and turned to him with an effort. He thrilled to the movement in which she was thus surrendered, but an instant later, feeling her rebellion, he abruptly released her, with the bitterness of defeat in his heart.

Her movement was a refusal which needed no further expression.

They stood silent for a moment. Marian silently invoked her affection for him and the common sense which bade her seek happiness and security. She had an impulse to cling, though she could not embrace—a momentary panic of her forlorn position, the result of the long effort it had cost her to hold herself erect under disappointment.

"Perhaps it has come too quickly," she said at last. "Perhaps if we waited——"

She paused, and added a moment later :

"Or, perhaps, I am just incapable."

"No, Marian," said Theodore quietly. "You are not incapable."

His eyes went involuntarily to the spot where she had been sitting with Guy hardly an hour ago. She followed his look, and Theodore, seeing that his thought was read, turned decisively away from the place, and, to cover his unintended allusion, moved to continue their walk.

§ 2

The short interview between Theodore and Marian had not passed without witnesses. Theodore had left his pipe behind him at the cottage, and Guy, perceiving this, hurried after him down the path towards the open glade. Sabina, who watched him run after his brother from the cottage window, suddenly saw him come abruptly to a stand upon the edge of the clearing, whence he could see the great beech. Then he turned back slowly with an expression almost of bewilderment on his face, like one who had seen something he did not understand. She left the cottage and ran to meet him. She almost guessed what he had seen, but she so eagerly wanted to know how the event was shaping, that she took him almost roughly by the arm.

"Well?" she asked breathlessly. "What did you see?"

Guy stared at her in amazement. She was not slow to observe that he seemed shaken.

"I don't exactly know," he said slowly. He was still holding the pipe in his hand.

"You look as if you'd seen a ghost," said Sabina with a nervous laugh.

"It was nothing," said Guy.

Angered by an evasiveness which was clearly the result of a wish to shield Marian from her curiosity, Sabina dropped his arm and stood away from him.

"Hadn't you better take Theodore his pipe?" she asked.

He looked at her with a faint surprise. Suddenly she snatched the pipe from his hands.

"I'll give it him myself," she said.

She was already on her way. Guy called to her peremptorily to stop, but she disregarded him and in a moment stood at the edge of the clearing.

Guy from that spot had seen his brother standing silently with Marian at the moment when he had taken her hand. Sabina, who arrived only a few brief moments later, saw Theodore draw Marian towards him. After one swift glance and a feeling in which shame and satisfaction were blended, she returned to Guy, who was waiting for her in the path. He looked at her with a stern displeasure such as she had never before seen in him.

"Please, Guy," she said, "I didn't really mean to look at them."

He turned without a word and walked away from her into the wood.

She stood a moment torn between an impulse to run after him and beg forgiveness, and the pride which held her, so often, blind and dumb in his presence.

She then went back to the cottage and busied herself with her work.

§ 3

As the evening wore on, the feeling which came more and more to prevail with Sabina was satisfaction with what she had seen. Theodore had taken Marian in his arms, and Marian had allowed it. Marian, it seemed, was to marry Theodore. This fact had discounted her jealousy, and it softened her pride by accusing her of injustice towards Guy. She began to long for his return. She desired to humble herself, to be pardoned, and to rest with Guy in a security greater than she had yet known.

Nevertheless, when Guy appeared at the door, her impulse to run to him died in her, as so often before. The evening passed with hardly a word between them. Guy was preoccupied with that startling vision of his brother silently holding the hand of Marian. The incident obscurely troubled him. It shook equally his idea of Marian and of Theodore, and filled him with a sense of extrusion.

Sabina attributed his preoccupation to the anger he had shown at her conduct in the wood. But that anger had been as short as it had been sudden—a flash of irritation at her headstrong invasion of a privacy which should have been respected.

He was still sunk in contemplation of the idea of Theodore incredibly in love, and, even more incredibly, Marian's accepted lover, when Sabina announced that she was going to bed. She stood at the door with a candle in her hand. Guy looked

at her, coming suddenly out of his thoughts. He had been vaguely aware during the evening of her diffident and incomplete movements of propitiation. He suddenly realised, as he saw her mute and fragile by the door, that she wanted to say something.

She put down the candle and came to him. She stood as though groping for words. All that she wished to say tumbled about her mind in disorder. She wanted to ask whether he was really angry. She wanted to confess that she had been jealously curious, and to humble herself for the offence. She wanted to bring forth all her dark ideas and fancies in order that he might put them to rest. She desired to say something which might lead them both to a perfect understanding, and make all future discord impossible. Such words came easily to her mind in solitude. But now, when most she needed them, they escaped her.

She felt only a horrible confusion of the brain and an ungovernable impulse to break through the silence which was closing about her. And she heard herself speak at last, not because she felt able to say what she wanted, but because she must say something, however inadequate.

"You're not angry with me?" she pleaded.

"Why should I be angry," said Guy.

"Don't put me off, Guy. I want to say so much."

He was struck by her urgency.

"There seems nothing to keep us together," she suddenly exclaimed. "Do you still love me as much as ever, Guy?"

"I love you too much!"

The exclamation was involuntary. Sabina had become part of him, so that her pain was almost physically his and all her moods actively troubled his peace. He had begun to dread this power she had to afflict him, and to resent a love which was beyond reason and beyond mere congruities of temper and taste. Sabina went unerringly to the source of his thought.

"You would like to love me less," she said. Then she added, with her terrible capacity for uniting a deep truth with a common-place and apparently irrelevant corollary :

"I shan't always be pretty."

The saying which brought her so crudely to earth made her the more forlorn.

Guy took her by the shoulders and looked long at the prettiness which would not last. He was feeling for a mystery which eluded him, which had never succeeded in expressing itself in plain terms, perhaps because it was too deep for the words he could not find. She felt him searching for this invisible reality behind the mask, and said to him, a little in awe of his penetrating eyes :

"I could almost think you would love me if I weren't pretty at all."

"And a moment ago you doubted altogether," said Guy.

"Oh, Guy. Everything's so mixed up. I don't rightly know sometimes what I think."

"Try to be sure."

"Sometimes," she responded after a while, "it seems wicked to doubt. Then something happens——"

She continued hurriedly, looking down and nervously fingering the buttons of his coat :

" I am afraid of your cousin. She and you have so much in common. I wanted to see her settled."

Guy stiffened.

" I thought you had got over that stupid feeling about Marian," he said.

" It's all right now," said Sabina. " She's going to marry Theodore."

She saw she had awakened in Guy an obscure resentment. She tightened her grasp of his hand.

" I'll try not to be so silly in future," she said.

Guy smiled, in sudden tenderness, as over a child promising in good faith, and with boundless confidence, never again to be troublesome.

Her contrition softened him and dispelled their estrangement.

They sat into the late evening, and then, stumbling close together about the dark garden, among the heavy scent of flowers and earth and the surrounding woodland, they discussed new schemes of horticulture for the fall of the year.

CHAPTER IX

§ I

NEXT morning Guy put aside his writing and worked in the garden. His happy hour with Sabina on the previous evening had driven from his mind the vague disquiet which had followed his sight of Theodore and Marian in the wood. He was already well content with the idea that these two should marry.

Juno and Jupiter were to keep house together, and into that house it would be rather fun to intrude occasionally. There he would find rest and dignity, a place untroubled by the ardours and perplexities of life. Moreover, this should definitely put an end to the absurd jealousy of Sabina. Turning over with his spade the fragrant brown earth of the garden, Guy smiled to himself in anticipation of the confession which Theodore would in due time have to make.

Sabina came out into the garden at intervals and stood pleasantly in the sun. She chaffed him for his digging, which was clearly that of a novice. She was light-hearted and could joke this morning, even concerning her rustic education.

She brought her work out into the garden, and sat on a small stool where he could see her and talk to her in the pauses of his labour. He liked to see her there ; and, when at last she went into the

house, he felt that the solitude of the garden was less satisfying than before.

Sabina was for a moment tranquil. She had brought her misgivings into the light, and Guy had made them seem of small account. Moreover she had seen Marian in the arms of Theodore. That spectacle was her guarantee, above all others, for the future.

In the afternoon Guy said he would walk to Old Place to see if there was any news of the event, which presumably was by this time for publication. On arriving he was told by Lady Melsham that Marian had gone to the cottage. He asked for tidings in a tone of expectancy that a little mystified Lady Melsham.

She informed him, in answer to his inquiry whether his brother were still there, that Theodore had left for London. Guy declined an invitation to remain and returned to the cottage.

§ 2

Sabina met him at the door. The evil mood had again touched her. She gave him the shut evasive look of those who brood on a secret resentment, and his spirits fell darkly. For a moment he thought of asking what it was that had again clouded her, to force this hidden trouble into the open where it could be met.

But he knew she would deny that anything had happened.

"Well?" he said with a forced cheerfulness. It was as near as he could come to a direct question.

"She's upstairs," said Sabina.

Guy gathered from this that Marian had arrived at the cottage, and that her arrival had in some way disconcerted his wife. He wondered what could possibly have happened.

But Sabina's mood was not due to anything which had actually occurred. She had merely leaped to the conclusion, on seeing Marian at the cottage door, that there was to be no engagement.

§ 3

Nothing in the manner of Marian, when she joined them a moment later, indicated that anything had or had not happened on the previous day.

Guy, expecting that she would say something, was puzzled by her silence. There was no reason for her to make any mystery of an event of domestic interest to them all. She made no allusion to it, however, in spite of several opportunities.

"I dropped in at Old Place this afternoon," said Guy. "Theodore has gone back to town, apparently."

"Yes," said Marian.

There was a short silence.

"Isn't that rather strange?" said Sabina suddenly.

She had been sitting quietly under an excitement that increased each time Marian refused to speak. She began to suffer an hysterical craving to force Marian to say what had happened. Guy turned to her in alarm. He heard the note in her voice which meant trouble for them all.

"Why should it be strange?" he said hastily.

"He came for a holiday," said Sabina. "And suddenly he goes back. Isn't that rather strange?"

There was an awkward silence. Guy looked at Marian. She had gone a little pale, but she clearly intended to say nothing.

"It seems very strange to me," said Sabina, harping remorselessly on the word. "Especially after what happened yesterday," she added abruptly.

Marian involuntarily froze into an attitude almost of disdain. She resented this intrusion, which somehow had become possible, into her privacy. Sabina saw in her attitude the recoil of a fine lady from an impertinence.

"I don't understand," said Marian stiffly.

She did not intend it, but she spoke as to an interloper. The affront had for the moment shaken her presence of mind.

"We thought you would have something to tell us," said Sabina, who now desired only to strike an insolent rival.

Marian's whole attention was concentrated on the "We." She looked swiftly at Guy, who already realised that she desired whatever had happened between her and Theodore to be exclusively her personal concern. He tried to save her the knowledge that they had seen anything of consequence.

"I suppose we jumped at conclusions," he said. "Nothing really to go upon."

His clumsy attempt to spare Marian had the worst possible effect on Sabina.

"What's all this mystery?" she exclaimed impatiently.

And, facing Guy, she said :

"Either she's engaged to Theodore or she isn't. It certainly looked as if she was engaged to him yesterday."

Marian rose from her chair. She was now completely mistress of herself.

"You seem somehow to know what has happened. I'm sorry, because it was something which concerned only Theodore and myself."

"I'm not sure of that," said Sabina darkly.

"Really," said Marian, "you must allow me to judge."

"Of course," said Guy. "That's more than enough about it."

Guy reached over the table and laid his hand on Marian's arm. In the heart of Sabina, seeing this, a snake was rearing to strike.

"I won't be put in the wrong," she cried. "Why can't she say whether she's engaged or not?"

"I'm not engaged to Theodore," said Marian quietly, "if you insist."

"It really isn't our affair," said Guy.

He looked at Marian, conveying with an almost imperceptible gesture that she would do well to leave them. Sabina was standing now, with a white blind face, wringing her apron between her hands.

She addressed herself directly to Guy.

"Of course it's none of your business, Guy,"

she said excitedly. "It doesn't affect you at all? You're not even glad to hear it."

Guy was accustomed to follow the queer twisting of her mind, its sudden jump from some chance word or look to monstrous conclusions. But even Guy was staggered. Before he could say a word she was saying things from which only gradually they could gather whence she had leaped into that small hell she perpetually made for herself. Marian, she seemed to say, had refused to marry Theodore (after what they had seen, too, in the wood yesterday) because she was waiting for somebody else. So be it. Guy could go his own way as soon as he liked, and with whom he liked (this with a venomous glance at Marian). Marriages were not really more sacred than engagements. An engagement had been broken. That, perhaps, made it easier for all parties to be happy and comfortable. Thus Sabina raved.

At this point Raymond called for her, and she left them abruptly to an appalled contemplation of the abyss into which they had looked. Marian wondered whether Guy realised her secret. She dreaded the awakening in him of a self-consciousness which might destroy their friendship. She was almost relieved when she found that his thoughts were far from that aspect of the question.

"Marian," he said. "I would give anything in the world to make Sabina happy."

He spoke with short pauses between his sentences.

"She torments herself perpetually," he said. "She is like a child, and I can seldom find the real reason of her trouble."

"You saw her just now," he went on. "That kind of thing often happens. A chance phrase, clumsy perhaps, but clearly not intended to hurt, touches some secret nerve."

He rose and went to the window.

"It seems hopeless at times," he said.

Marian for a while could say nothing.

"I can't help you, Guy," she said at last. "I can do no good between you."

She made ready to go, and Guy prepared to accompany her. Marian looked at him with a sad smile, indulgently wondering how in some things he could be so blind.

"Not this afternoon," she said quietly. "It won't improve matters for you to come with me."

§ 4

After Marian had left, Guy remained by the window till Sabina, having quieted Raymond, came back into the room. He watched her clearing away the tea things with the settled look of offence on her face which was now so familiar. He saw no hope of amendment from anything he could say. He took his hat and stick and left the cottage.

It was dusk when he returned, and Sabina was waiting for him with the supper prepared. She ignored his efforts to get into touch, answering him with the intolerable patience of those who suffer their wrongs meekly.

At last he could bear it no longer. Pushing away his plate, he went round the table and took her by the shoulders.

"Sabina," he urged. "What is the matter with you?"

Sabina stubbornly shut her lips.

"Why did you make a scene just now with Marian?" Guy continued.

"I'm not in the habit of making scenes," said Sabina.

Guy doggedly pursued her. "I can't for the life of me see what Marian's engagement has to do with us," he said.

"It has nothing to do with me," said Sabina; "and, of course, it has nothing to do with you that it is broken off."

Her tone was big with implications which refused to be ignored. Guy felt that the position would not be improved by yielding to anger, and he put a strong constraint upon himself.

"You've something on your mind, Sabina. Tell me what it is. You know perfectly well that this business does not affect us in the least."

"Then there's no more to be said," Sabina rejoined.

She had not once looked at Guy during the conversation, and the fixed look of estrangement had not left her face for an instant.

Guy turned away. Involuntarily he clenched his hands.

"We can't go on like this," he exclaimed.

In the silence that followed all the slight sounds of the wood and garden intruded irrelevantly into the room. A moth entered, and, after an uncertain flight hither and thither, fell scorched beside the lamp. Guy absently put the creature out of its

misery. Sabina rose to clear away the supper. Her movement implied that the night would end with nothing bettered or explained. They would lie beside one another, vaguely but tensely hostile, until, exhausted with fancied recriminations, the more bitter for remaining undelivered, they would sleep, and pretend to-morrow that nothing had happened.

Guy resolved that to-night should end differently from that, and Sabina, in the act of collecting the the supper things, heard herself ordered to put them down.

"We've got to get clear on this," said Guy.

Sabina was frightened by his vehemence.

"I'm willing to be friends, if you are," she said.

"And then it will happen again to-morrow and again, and again, and again," said Guy. "We want something better than that."

"People who make mistakes must stand by the consequences," said Sabina. "You're sorry you married me, and that's the truth," she concluded.

"That's a wicked thing to say."

"You can't deny that you're sorry. And somebody else is sorry too."

"You mean Marian?"

"Who else should I mean?"

"Marian's done her best to be friends."

"Marian's perfect," said Sabina. "It's a pity I came between you."

"Don't be ridiculous," said Guy angrily.

"You're being utterly absurd."

Sabina, pushed into the open, looked him boldly in the face. "Marian would give anything to get

you," she said; "and she'd have you fast enough if it were not for me."

Guy lost patience altogether at this. He shook her roughly by the arm.

"Hold your tongue!" he said with a violence which surprised them both.

They were smitten with dismay at the width of the breach which had opened between them. There was a short unhappy silence, broken at last by Guy.

"I have never regretted our marriage," he said, trembling with indignation. "But you are doing your best to make me regret it now."

§ 5

He hastily left the cottage, and wandered down the road. There was a cheerful gleam from the "Three Foresters," and Mrs. Basing smiled a welcome from behind the bar. But he passed on moodily, and decided that never again would life hold for him anything of good cheer. Sabina's fancies about Marian he dismissed as wholly unfounded. They simply indicated the hopelessness of trying to deal with her as a rational being.

He returned to the cottage after midnight. Sabina was already in bed. She had passed the intervening hour in activities partly inspired by a letter which she had recently received from her sister, who was now married and living in a house of her own near Steyning. Guy was surprised to find that Sabina was not only in bed but sleeping. Usually on these occasions she would be lying alert for his arrival. He undressed without disturbing

her, and lay beside her with his thoughts still turning upon their recent interview.

Once he was faintly aware that Sabina had risen, and was attending to Raymond, and later he was aroused to the fact that her arms were about him. But reconciliation had too often come in that way, and he lay still and unresponsive.

He slept soundly at last, and awoke to find the dawn at their window. Again without disturbing her he rose and made himself ready for the day. Raymond was still sleeping in his cradle. Guy could not endure the cottage, where the air seemed to be burdened with echoes of yesterday. He scrawled a note saying that he was going to town by an early train, and would not be back till the evening. Before leaving the cottage he looked at his wife, who lay with her face to the growing light. Sleep had smoothed the hard hostility of yesterday to a childlike petulance. There had been tears on her face. He bent to her, and only just resisted an impulse to take her in his arms and let her awaken there to an assurance that another estrangement had passed like the rest. But he feared to see her face harden under his eyes. He preferred to bear away with him a picture which moved in him the old tenderness.

When he returned that night the cottage was silent and dark. A message awaited him on the mantelpiece to the effect that she had taken Raymond to stay with her sister for a while. She would return when Guy was sufficiently eager to receive her.

CHAPTER X

§ I

GUY did not immediately pursue Sabina to her place of retreat. He wrote her a letter saying he would be glad when she was ready to come to him. Meanwhile she must let him know regularly how she was, and he would send her the money she required. It was a letter without life or character, the result of feelings which cancelled one another and left him uncertain what to say or do. Sabina replied that she was well in health, and repeated that she would return when Guy was sufficiently eager to receive her.

Meanwhile Guy saw his book through the press and lived increasingly the life of a hermit. Winter drifted towards him, and still Sabina remained away. Occasionally she wrote, briefly intimating that she and Raymond were as well as could be expected, and acknowledged his cheques. She said she was quite comfortable with her sister, who just then was in need of help and was glad to have her in the house.

It was some time before it was realised abroad that Guy and Sabina were not living together. Marian did not again come to the cottage, and Theodore had gone to nurse a constituency in the North of England to which he had been nominated as official Unionist candidate. In London Guy

avoided Aunt Helen ; and, when he saw her, said nothing about the scene at the cottage.

Guy, during these solitary weeks, measured the extent to which Sabina prevailed in his life by the desolation which he felt in her absence. He was urged continually towards the girl who was irremediably associated with the most exquisite moments as well as the most urgent distresses of his life. But he was restrained by an intelligence that was not to be hoodwinked. He had within him a spectator who saw clearly that, if Sabina returned immediately, there would at once arise the same perverse misunderstandings.

He could nevertheless hardly have refrained from bringing back Sabina, had he not found an unprecedented outlet for his charged emotions. In long solitary walks at all hours over the countryside, fighting with his bitter deprivation, sensitised by loneliness and desire, he found himself haunted, as never before, by an intense necessity for expression. He was a musician from birth ; he had mixed from boyhood with musicians ; he was sufficiently acquainted with musical science to disdain it. Already he had written songs which a friend had introduced, not without success, into his recitals. He began now for the first time to feel an overwhelming desire to test himself as a composer.

One night, in the silent room at Brambletye, he took his pen in hand, and, almost with a sense of predestination to that end, he began to set down in haste themes on which his mind had been tentatively at work for several days.

One morning, a little later, in a moment of audacity, he wrote "Ballade Symphonique" upon the first sheet of his score, and soon he was striving against odds to express the musical ideas which had taken root. He based his symphony on passages of Arnold's "Forsaken Merman," but soon discovered in himself an impatience with literary ideas, and used his music to express his personal sense of desolation and frustrated love.

§ 2

It was Theodore who first learned that Guy was living as a bachelor. He returned to Old Place in December, after a political defeat in which he had conducted himself to the satisfaction of the Whips, and he dropped suddenly upon his brother at Brambletye.

A few days previously Henderson had complained to Theodore of Guy's recent behaviour. It seemed that Guy did not keep sufficiently in touch with his editor. For the last weeks he had even been late with his article, and it had been written with more than his usual neglect of current musical events. Henderson, moreover, had detected something perfunctory in Guy's more recent performances, as though the writer's mind was away upon other matters. Theodore wondered what could be more particularly occupying his brother at this time, more especially as he knew that the book, "Contemporary Composers," was finished.

Theodore let himself into the cottage, finding the door on the latch. He found Guy deeply engaged. The table was littered with music paper, and Guy,

ruffled and unshaven, was scratching vigorously with a fountain pen. He sat in an armchair by the fire, which gave almost more light than the candles on the mantelpiece. One half of the table was encumbered with the remains of a meal recently consumed. The other half was covered with books, papers and minor implements.

When Guy heard the click of the latch his first thought was that Sabina had come home. The effect of his thought was strange. It was not exactly hope or joy that he felt, but all his faculties leaped to eager attention and his starved emotions clamoured suddenly for satisfaction. Then, when he saw his brother, the room went suddenly dead. It was as though a light had been blown out.

They greeted casually. Theodore picked his way to a chair between the sheets that littered the floor, and added his hat to the accumulation of objects which covered the table. He pointed to the sheets.

"What's all this?" he asked.

"I'm hoping it's the divine fire," said Guy.

"There seems to be rather a lot of it," said Theodore.

"It's perhaps a symphony," said Guy.

He was shy of talking about his new work, and hastened to change the subject.

"Why didn't they elect you to Parliament?" he enquired. "Seems such an obvious thing to do," he added.

"The other fellow was more obvious," said Theodore.

Theodore began to fill a pipe. He wanted to

hear what had become of his brother's wife. Guy did not spontaneously enlighten him.

"Somebody seems to be missing," said Theodore at last.

"For the time being," said Guy.

"Anything wrong?" Theodore enquired.

Guy sat up in his armchair, and some symphony slipped from his knees to the floor.

"Sometimes I think everything's wrong, and then it seems like nothing at all."

"What has happened?"

"We had a scene—one of our usual scenes, only a bit worse. She's with her sister."

"Why don't you bring her back?"

"If I bring her back, it will happen all over again. Besides this last time she was perfectly outrageous. She had got something into her head about Marian."

Theodore quickly changed the subject.

"You're neglecting the *Moderator*."

"Is anybody grumbling?"

"You're paid to visit certain concerts, and you can't afford to be dismissed. That's the point to consider." He paused a moment. "How are funds at the present moment?" he added.

"I could borrow some with advantage," said Guy, with his broad smile.

Theodore rose in some impatience. He had come from a busy world of affairs. He was exasperated by the contrast offered here by a brother whom he regarded as superior rather than inferior to himself in native gifts. He looked round the littered room and down at Guy, dark under the

eyes from days and nights of feverish endeavour. Theodore did not believe in the symphony. It was one of Guy's impetuous enthusiasms which would break down for lack of technical training and industry. Meanwhile Guy was neglecting his livelihood ; he had made a failure of his marriage ; and he behaved in money matters like a cheerfully insolvent undergraduate.

"I'm glad you're hard up," said Theodore shortly. "It may bring you to your senses."

Guy's blue eyes kindled.

"It won't bring me on my knees to Henderson."

§ 3

The momentary dispute had ended in the familiar way. Guy had apparently paid no regard to his brother, but Theodore knew that for a few weeks at least he would behave himself rather better. Theodore knew he was in the right, and, as always before, derived no satisfaction from the fact. There were times, especially when he was quarrelling with his brother, when Theodore almost resented his incapacity to be wrong. Even now, as he walked away through the dark wood, he thought enviously rather than compassionately of Guy, ascetically alone, working with the fever of aspiration in his veins and the hot gleam of the enthusiast in his eyes. Theodore, returning to the praise and comfort which attend success, and to the large equable life of Old Place, felt that in some indefinite way Guy had stolen his birthright.

That evening Guy, thinking of his brother at Old Place, without envy, hugged closely to his

heart the compensations of an outlaw. He had scrawled in haste a theme which branched like the heavenly mustard seed. To-morrow he might find the music vanishing between the lines of his MS. To-night he felt the creator's joy who believes that his work is good. His momentary happiness as an artist filled him with tenderness for all the world ; and, on a background of bewilderment and pain, he saw glimmering the face of his absent wife as she had slept under his eyes on the morning of her departure. He decided that, as soon as his symphony was finished, he would bring her home. He would not go for her until he had finished. Her return might break his inspiration.

§ 4

For several weeks Guy's execution of his duty as musical critic of the *Moderator* left nothing to be desired. Then the symphony again gripped him hard, and he omitted one week to note that his article was overdue.

Severely reprimanded by Henderson, he called at the office to justify himself. The pain of his wife's absence and the effort, always intense and only seldom happy, to govern his musical ideas, made him impatient of all discipline and resentful of details. On the day of his visit to Henderson, it did not improve matters that, having had nothing to eat that morning, he first visited a bar which stood adjacent. He came to his interview primed for a hearty dispute, and he did not fail to impart to it an alcoholic bluster which Henderson deprecated to the extent of pointedly retreating to

a far corner of the room and throwing up the window. Then and there Henderson determined to look sidelong for a successor.

The end came suddenly and soon. A member of Henderson's staff had been recently returned to Parliament, and Henderson decided to give a dinner at the Savoy in celebration of the occasion. Henderson was doubtful of the propriety of including his musical critic, who was at the best of times a possible discord. He accordingly postponed the delivery of the card inviting Guy to the party.

On the day appointed for the dinner Guy was sitting in the office writing his weekly article when Henderson passed through to his private room. Guy turned to greet him and Henderson at once decided to withhold the invitation. Guy had that day the fanatical look of a man who wrestles with tasks to which he is divinely urged. His eyes were haggard. The unkempt look of the hermit was about him; and he was vacant in his rejoinders. His coat was burned and soiled with the ashes of his pipe. His hair, which should have been cut several weeks ago, almost flamed above the cold bright blue of his brooding eyes. He had scarcely broken his fast that day, and he had been compelled to obtain energy for his hateful labour of the unwilling penman in a fashion which produced in the apprehensive nostrils of Henderson an imperceptible twitching.

Guy would have left the office in happy ignorance of the festivity from which he was debarred, had it not been for Theodore's unexpected arrival on

the scene. Theodore came to enquire the time of the dinner, and, seeing Guy, applied to him for information. Guy said he had heard nothing at all about it. Theodore said that all the staff was to be there, and that he himself had seen a card made out in Guy's name on the Editor's desk.

Theodore went upstairs to Henderson.

He returned with the news that the dinner was mainly political, and that Guy, being notoriously indifferent to politics, was not asked to attend. He looked closely at his brother, and then with a slight shrug left the office.

Guy thought little of this incident at the time, but half an hour later, as he sat on a tall stool in an adjacent bar, the circumstances vividly recurred. He had by that time the keenness of vision, almost amounting to clairvoyance, sometimes attained by those who drink unwisely upon an empty stomach. He remembered the twitching of Henderson's nose.

He put his glass down emphatically on the counter.

"I could almost believe," he muttered, "that the fellow was smelling me."

"This requires to be investigated," he told himself a moment later.

He ordered another whiskey and soda. A number of incidents, unnoticed at the time, danced into his head and out again, all seeming to push him to a conclusion as yet distant and unidentified. There had been an invitation for him on the Editor's table. What was going to happen? Something festive. Oh, yes, he remembered it

now. It was a feast. Theodore had said it was a political feast. Nevertheless that fellow who wrote about pictures had come into the office while he was writing his article, and now he remembered distinctly that the chief clerk had said something about 8.15 in the Pinafore Rooms. Why was that silly aesthete going to a political dinner?

"I know," said Guy aloud, to the surprise of the gentleman on the next stool. "It isn't a political dinner."

And then that other incriminating fact recurred.

Henderson's nostrils had indubitably twitched. In a moment he saw the whole affair. All the staff, including Theodore, were going to a big dinner at the Savoy, but he, it seems, was to be kept out of it, because Henderson had an abnormally sensitive nose.

He saw himself encircled with sly conspiracy. He remembered an incident in his childhood when there had been a plan to exclude him from a party because he had notably misbehaved himself. On that occasion he had proved one too many for his oppressors by hiding under the tea table. The incident had ended in marzipan and jam tarts, which tasted all the better for being the pledge of his victory. He particularly remembered how, under the table, he had tickled the legs, faultlessly ending in white socks and shiny black shoes, of dear little Theodore, who hadn't misbehaved himself at all.

"Yes," said Guy, with a grave smile at the lady behind the counter. "I tickled his legs."

§ 5

The moderators assembled at eight o'clock and walked into dinner at 8.15. The principal guest, a junior cabinet minister, was uncertain whether he would be present. A cover was laid for him on the right of Henderson. Everything, so far, was according to plan, and Henderson smiled upon a distinguished company. Over the soup someone commented on the absence of Guy, who, to the satisfaction of the younger members, often succeeded in stemming the Carltonese of the older political contingent.

"Our musical critic will not be here to-night," said Henderson.

To the older men, near at hand, and well out of hearing of Theodore, he added that he had taken measures for the exclusion of their young friend in view of his unfortunate condition not two hours ago.

"It was rather a problem," he said, "but I fancy we handled it successfully."

Henderson spoke too soon. At the double doors in the centre of the longer side of the room there was suddenly an apparition. The light shimmered upon a mass of gleaming hair, desperately brushed but defying all restraint. Eyes, which were two blue points of light, glittered from under this shining thatch and from the midst of a countenance ruddy with excitement and burnished from the towel. A tie, more or less white, protruded outrageously from under one ear. The vest and tail coat were in order; but in the dim light of a Hampstead room the intruder had mistakenly

put on a pair of blue serge trousers a little baggy at the knees.

Guy advanced into the room with the delicate deliberation of a man who knows that he is in complete possession of his faculties, but rather fears that his friends may have a doubt of it. Henderson, seeing his most important function for many months threatened with eclipse, gazed sternly upon the intruder. Guy wore the look of a small boy who has outwitted his enemies, and can with difficulty restrain himself from putting his tongue out.

He walked skilfully towards the vacant chair on Henderson's right hand, and sat down with extreme accuracy. He bent confidentially towards his host, and carefully inquired whether he might borrow a five shilling piece. He said something about having a cab outside.

With strategical promptitude Henderson pressed half a sovereign into his hand, accompanied him to the double door, and with severe satisfaction watched him safely into the corridor. The head waiter was instructed not to re-admit the gentleman. The door, if necessary, must be guarded.

The head waiter placed sentries in position, and Theodore quietly left the room to intercept his brother and take charge of him. Theodore could find Guy in none of the adjacent passages, and, returning, answered Henderson's unspoken query with a re-assuring nod. The incident, briefly deplored by the older men and briefly enjoyed by the younger ones, appeared to be terminated. Henderson, resuming his soup, smiled grimly at the waiters by the double door.

Suddenly, on the opposite side of the room, a smaller door was seen abruptly to open. From this undefended breach in the citadel Guy, looking from Henderson to the three waiters guarding the opposite side, broke into a broad sly smile and for a sign of triumph lifted his forefinger playfully.

Clearly it was a victory. The three waiters, moving dutifully towards the intruder, were checked by a glance from the head of the table, and the younger men, with creditable presence of mind, ostentatiously made room for him below the salt.

Guy devoted his evening almost solely to Henderson. He did not once look at his brother, and he said hardly a word to his immediate companions. He was bent upon proving to the fellow who had almost seemed to smell him that in the first place he had never in his life been recognisably under the influence of drink, and that in the second place when it came to a really personal encounter between them, Guy Reval was the better man. To prove that he began the evening sober, he insisted that the waiters, who had a tendency to omit the replenishing of his glass, should do their duty by him. He waited for the man to come round, met him with a stony stare, and indicated with a gesture that a certain glass was notoriously empty. Otherwise he looked continually at Henderson and waited smilingly for his speech.

Against all reason and very much against his will, Henderson became increasingly uncomfortable under the relentlessly smiling contemplation to which he was thus submitted. He felt the presence

of an active impropriety, of something that mocked at the urbanities he represented and that discounted in advance the sober periods in which he shortly intended to celebrate the dignity and influence of the higher journalism. Henderson had the habit of an orator before oratory had been submitted to the influence of a democratic platform. He had a sympathetic audience in the older men, and he expected to charm and impress the cabinet minister who had by this time arrived.

It was with the utmost difficulty that he contrived to speak at all. What chance of success has the orator who looks round for sympathy, and meets an implacable Mephistophelian blue eye in which he is relentlessly mocked; who cannot forget that, beneath his sacred table, there rests a pair of legs indecently clad in blue serge; whose fingers twitch to set right a discursive white tie, partially eclipsed by an ear bent to listen with exaggerated respect to the voice of wisdom; who, amid the murmured assent and corroboration of his guests, infallibly waits for an over emphatic and too distinct "hear, hear," which somehow pricks the rhetorical bubble before it can soar to the height of the occasion?

Henderson sat down knowing that, by no fault of his own, he had failed to do himself justice.

The speech of the cabinet minister was perfunctory and brief. The minister was not aware that anything was really wrong, but he was tired, and still had work to do that evening. Henderson, who thought that everyone at the table was as painfully aware of Guy as he himself, attributed

the flatness of the minister's speech to the circumstance which had spoiled his own. His only consolation was mentally to phrase the letter of dismissal he would write to-morrow.

Towards the end of the proceedings, when the cabinet minister had gone, Guy himself was observed to rise suddenly to his feet. Apparently he, too, had a speech to make. He was heard to utter the word "moderators" distinctly. But the effort to articulate required so much concentration of the faculties that he had no attention to spare for his legs. The accumulating weakness of several months seemed suddenly to find a seat in them.

When they carried him to the window they found he had actually fainted. His brother accompanied him home to Hampstead and put him to bed. The indignation which Theodore had steadily encouraged in himself through the evening was checked by his discovery that his brother was suffering as much from too little food as from too much alcohol.

Guy, sobered by his sudden illness, sat with his brother in the cab feeling rather like a child in disgrace ; but the sole effect of a comment from Theodore on the evening's work was to spur him to a blustering defiance of the consequences. Theodore had a great deal to say, but he had also a clear perception that this was hardly the time to say it.

On the following day Guy received a message through the post to the effect that he might cease to regard himself as a member of the staff.

CHAPTER XI

§ I

GUY'S career as a respectable journalist was for the moment ended. Shortly after his dismissal from the *Moderator*, he accepted a post as musical critic on a weekly organ which underpaid its contributors (or did not pay them at all) for reviling its more reputable contemporaries. Theodore in vain dissuaded him from thus proscribing himself.

He equally failed to influence his brother in another matter. Theodore's work at the bar and his interests as a prospective candidate for a doubtful seat in the House left him no further time for his work as Lord Melsham's secretary. Guy was, at Theodore's suggestion, invited to fill the post. Lord Melsham thought that responsibility and regular work might steady him. Guy, however, could not be persuaded. He was still absorbed by his music, and had just sufficient confidence and pleasure in it to support him in the belief that he had a right to stand against the world, to play the outcast, and nourish a contempt of worldliness in all its forms.

He took long solitary walks, in course of which he liked to pass the warm houses where safe and comfortable people sat down to regular meals, or slept upon the best bedding, while he, a lonely

zealot, his head humming with the music which moved him so mightily till he had actually set it down, passed them by, his breath lying mistily upon the cold air, a sense of outlawry and adventure warming his blood, proud to feel that he had now no need of the ease and security desired by timid souls, but that he was living his own secluded life, frugal and unencumbered, in order that genius might have its way. In such a mood as this Guy scornfully dismissed Lord Melsham's offer. It was the world's way to have ready a pinch of salt for the tail of a free spirit. He buried himself wilfully away from all corruptors of genius; and, as the days lengthened over the cottage, and spring began to be busy in the wood, he grew daily more solitary, haggard and self-consumed.

Nevertheless his desire for Sabina's return was never quite in abeyance, and often he was on the point of yielding. First, however, he must finish his symphony.

More than once he decided overnight to start for Steyning on the following morning, a decision which was only broken when the time came by a sudden renewal of his musical inspiration. One day he had taken his ticket for Steyning at the local station, when it suddenly became clear to him how he might successfully deal with a passage which hitherto had baffled him. He returned to the cottage, and worked till nightfall.

§ 2

The day, however, came at last, a warm day in April, when the decision taken overnight, though

the symphony was not yet finished, was actually carried out. He took the train in the morning, and arrived at the cottage where Sabina was staying early in the afternoon. It was a small and isolated dwelling under the shoulder of the Downs. Guy was amazed, now that he was so near to Sabina, that he had remained wilfully away so long. Had she been living thirty yards from him instead of thirty miles, he would have brought her back again within a few days. Was thirty miles, then, so effective a barrier—thirty miles and the rankling of a few angry phrases?

Now that he saw before him the house where she was living, he could not have left it upon the strictest summons. Would he be able to win her back? Months of cold neglect and brief constrained messages stood between them. She had allowed all that time to pass without a gesture of reconciliation. Perhaps she had found peace in that place and desired to keep it.

He walked to the door and paused a moment listening for a sign of occupation. No sound came to him there. The only sign of life was the smoke from the chimney and the windows opened wide to the air. He shrank from breaking the silence, and, stepping softly aside to one of the windows, looked into the room.

Sabina was sitting at the table reading a magazine. She had on her face the expression for which he had often teased her, an expression of concentration as of a child intent upon a story book. A half emptied cup of tea stood beside her. On a horse-hair sofa on the further side of the room a

woman lay sleeping. It was obviously Sabina's sister. She had Sabina's features, but not Sabina's face.

Sabina turned a page and took up her tea-cup without removing her eyes from the page. Guy, as he looked, felt the tenderness of one who watches someone dear doing immaterial things, unconscious of being observed. That he was a spectator of these small actions, with the power at once to break in and change the picture, filled him with a queer pleasure, in which compassion was somehow mingled. What he saw was aloof and yet familiar, remote and yet very dear. And the simplest act thus viewed had an exaggerated significance, as though it had been staged for his enlightenment. It was like a crisis of destiny when she took up her cup.

To set it down, Sabina looked from the book to her saucer. In so doing she caught sight of Guy at the window. For a moment she stared at him in amazement. Then she rose quickly, put her finger to her lips, and left the room. In another moment she was beside him in the garden.

Her rapid movement had broken the wistful spell set upon Guy by his sight of her in the quiet room. In the brief moment before her appearance in the garden he had time to wonder how she would greet him and what he would say to her.

She came to him like a child, and they neither of them said a word. All the speeches Guy had thought to make became impossible. She clung so fast, that when at last he gently tried to put

her away in order to see and read her looks she seemed unaware of the effort. He realised in that moment the extent of her desolation during the last months.

"Sabina," he whispered over her bent head, "I wanted to come before."

She answered, sobbing for her breath :

"Oh, Guy, I thought you had given me up altogether. You mustn't be angry with me again. I can't bear it."

Slowly the first flush of their meeting subsided, and they dropped to a discussion of what they would do.

"Come home to me," Guy urged.

"I can't," said Sabina. "I'll tell you why later."

"When?"

"When Jim (that's my sister's husband) comes home. I'll meet you somewhere."

"Why not tell me now?"

"My sister might wake up."

"Why are you so mysterious? Don't you want her to see me?"

"I don't want her to wake up."

"Aren't you going to let me come into the cottage? I must see Raymond, you know."

"You can see Raymond, but don't make a noise."

He followed her into the cottage, and they passed on tiptoe through the room where Sabina's sister was sleeping, to the stairs which ran up from a door in the corner. Raymond was sleeping in a huge bed barricaded with bolsters.

"He's more like you than he was," said Guy.
"He has your mouth."

"Sh—sh," said Sabina.

Guy touched the child's lips lightly with his finger.

"Now you must come away," whispered Sabina.
"I shall bring him back to you soon."

Outside the cottage he protested once more.

"Why shouldn't I stay?"

"In half an hour Jim will be back. You will see me coming up the side of the hill. It's lovely up there on the Downs."

He kissed her and held her a moment, and then went into the road. A broad grass track zigzagged from the road up the side of the Down whose back lay parallel. Always as he turned, Guy saw Sabina still standing at the door of the cottage, a figure which each time grew smaller, till at last he could not see her face distinctly.

Sitting on the top of the Down, whence he commanded the road below, Guy was divided between the happy promise of Sabina's coming and a faint resentment at her refusal to let him stay at the cottage. Instinctively he feared some perverse reason for her anxiety to keep him away. The matter worried him at intervals, till at last, pulling himself angrily together, and reminding himself that no such perversities as he feared must ever again be permitted to come between them, he surrendered wholly to the hour.

§ 3

Sabina's unwillingness to allow Guy to remain at the cottage was natural enough.

It was Sabina's tragedy that the sense of class, normally grounded upon mean or indifferent motives, was in her case fostered by the great passion of her life. Her love for Guy caused her to brood upon her social inferiority, and made her abnormally sensitive to all that divides people according to externals. On returning to her sister's house she had found that she had left her sister's life behind her. Hitherto she had only been conscious of her inferiority to Guy's friends and relatives. Now she became aware of her superiority to the environment of her girlhood, which insensibly she had outgrown. She noticed her sister's speech, her ways of eating and standing, all the incorrect gentilities or positive offences whose existence Sabina had herself almost forgotten. Her sister had on her the effect of an uncouth version of herself, and she often thought to herself in horror that thus she must seem to Guy and his friends. This was the life from which Guy had rescued her; she had left it already behind; she wanted to stand clear from it in his thoughts. Obscurely she felt: "I do not belong to this place, and he must never see me again as a part of it." She had really gone some part of the way towards him. She prized those few steps in his direction, and would never let him think for a moment that she could retrace them. It was not that she was ashamed of her people. There was nothing base in her passion for gentlehood. It had become involved in her love, so that anything which threatened to recall or to expose her humble beginning threatened also to endanger her hold upon Guy.

§ 4

It was not long before Guy, from the summit of the Down, saw a working man coming along the road from Steyning. He followed his progress with excitement. Most likely it was Jim, coming to release Sabina. How slow seemed the progress of the man along the distant road. Now he was almost abreast of the cottage; and, as he turned at the gate and entered, Guy banged the turf joyfully with his stick.

The man disappeared into the cottage, and Guy waited eagerly for something to happen. In about ten minutes, when Guy had begun to suffer agonies of impatience, Sabina suddenly came from the cottage door. She had no hat, but was coming just as he had seen her first. She crossed the road with quick steps and began to climb the hillside.

Guy jumped to his feet and went to meet her.

He brought her to the top of the Down, and for a long while they rested there in deep tranquility. Sabina looked down over the wide country, her spirit filled with its spaciousness, her face a little advanced to meet the air which rustled up to them over the gray-green turf. Guy saw her in profile against the gracious line of the Downs which dipped and rose softly against the blue of the sky. He saw her as part of the fragrance and colour of the afternoon, of the soft green, the tender blue and the golden light upon the fields below.

They asked one another many questions, each desiring to fill the vacancy in their lives of the months of absence. Sabina spoke little of her time with her sister. She helped her sister with the

house and garden and poultry. She rarely left the cottage except to shop in Steyning. Of Guy she wanted a full tale. He told her of the music he was writing and of his dismissal from the *Moderator*. At first she was scared by this unexpected news, and Guy, for the first time, felt guilty in thinking of his recent escapade at the Savoy.

"This music you're doing," she said. "Will it be done in a theatre?"

"Perhaps it won't be done at all," said Guy cheerfully.

"Shall we get any money for it?"

"I'm doing it for fun," said Guy.

"What's it about?"

"It was going to be about a merman who lived under the sea and married a woman from the land who went away and left him. But the merman turned into me living alone in the cottage and thinking of you."

"Then it's really about me," said Sabina in an awed voice. "And I shan't be able to understand it," she added a moment later.

She looked sadly at the man who expressed his love for her in a language she could not read.

"I wish we lived on a hill," said Sabina, after one of their long silences.

"This kind of hill?" said Guy.

"A hill without any trees, with the sky all round it. I love the Downs."

She lifted a harebell blown flat by the light breeze and supported it against the wind with her finger.

"They are so soft and big," she said, talking still of the Downs. "They seem to be kind. Don't laugh at me, Guy."

"Why shouldn't we live here?" said Guy. "We could have a cottage in Steyning, and you could come up here as often as you liked."

"Not in Steyning," said Sabina quickly, thinking of her sister.

"Why not in Steyning?" Guy asked.

"The Downs go on for miles," she answered evasively.

Guy felt a return of the resentment he had felt before, when she had refused to let him wait at the cottage.

"Did you see Jim?" she went on suddenly, with seeming inconsequence.

"I did," said Guy; "if it was Jim that came home just now."

"Jim is a bricklayer," said Sabina, looking at Guy and flushing imperceptibly.

"I once wanted to be a bricklayer," said Guy.

"You needn't be funny about it," said Sabina.

"Jim be hanged," said Guy. "Why aren't you coming home with me to-night?"

"My sister has no one to stay with her."

"Must she have someone?"

"Of course."

"Why, is anything the matter with her?"

"Didn't you notice? She's going to have a baby seven weeks from now."

"It will be seven ages."

"I believe you do love me, Guy."

§ 5

Sabina stayed till sunset. They passed the time sitting or rambling, as the mood took them. It was getting dark when they at last descended the hill. Their hearts were full of the time they had had together, almost unshadowed. Sabina lingered as they approached the road, and at last brought Guy to a stand.

"It's been beautiful," she said. "Say good-bye here. I will come, and sit here in the evenings and think of it."

"It seems silly for me to go away like this," said Guy.

Sabina fidgeted nervously with her foot.

"Don't spoil it, Guy. I don't want you to come to the cottage."

"But why not?"

"Please, dear, allow me to know what's best."

"Because Jim's a bricklayer?" said Guy, bitter at heart.

Sabina's face began to have the look he feared.

"Sabina, say it isn't that."

"I don't want you to come," she repeated. She caught at him with a little gesture of desperation. "Don't let's quarrel about it, Guy. It's just something I ask you."

Her eyes filled with tears to enforce her appeal, and Guy felt how poor a thing it would be to deny the whim which possessed her.

"Very well," he said.

"This is good-bye, then," he added, with discontent in his voice.

"No, Guy, not like that. Be patient with me."

Suddenly overwhelmed with shame for his childishness, he took her in his arms, and for a moment they stood deeply embraced.

"There, darling," said Guy at last. "Go now, if you must."

At the foot of the hill she paused and waved to him. As he waved back at the frail dim figure below, he realised that this unreasonable parting left him restless and unsatisfied. He had yielded to a whim for which he had no respect. They had kept the peace, but only by avoiding the issue which lay between them.

CHAPTER XII

§ I

GUY pushed on rapidly with his composition, and it was soon almost finished.

The time with Sabina, which had seemed so perfect, had left him strangely dejected. He came to realise clearly that they had only avoided another wretched quarrel owing to his forbearance. He divined exactly the motive which had prompted Sabina to keep him away from her sister. That sudden sentence flung out with the irrelevance that so often reveals coherence in the inward thought had given him the key. Jim was a bricklayer. Guy was secretly revolted by the sensitiveness of Sabina to such things. He saw the baseness of the motive without seeing the deeper sources from which it sprang. He wished sometimes he had dragged her reasons into the open and denounced them. He had acquiesced only because he loved her; but what sort of love, he asked himself, would they be able to base upon such a lack of candour in their dealings as was here implied?

Thinking of Sabina in this way, he no longer felt his bereavement as an inspiration. He was divided between a feverish desire for her return and an uneasiness regarding it which distracted him in a way hopelessly barren. He realised that,

though there may be inspiration in suffering, worry is merely a nuisance.

Guy was at the most discouraging of all moments for the immature artist. The hot fit of creation had passed and he was now assessing the results. The perfection he had hoped to grasp had eluded him, and, judging what he had done by what he had hoped to do, he was easily inclined to despair. He began to wonder whether what he had actually composed would mean anything at all to a stranger. He longed for judgment, for someone to destroy for ever his dream of creation, or to assure him that he was not wholly uninspired. The positive impulse had for the moment died in him ; he was now a merciless critic, who read or played a score and saw only its technical insufficiency.

§ 2

It was in such a mood of misbelief and dejection that some six weeks after his visit to Steyning he unexpectedly met Marian by the great beech. Marian was now staying at Old Place. The post of secretary to Lord Melshan, which Guy had rejected had at Theodore's further suggestion been offered to Marian. Lord Melshan was a little singular at that time in his decision to take a lady secretary, but he was soon able to congratulate himself upon the result. Marian liked the work. That it made of her a constant neighbour for Guy did not seem greatly to matter, for Guy now avoided Old Place, and Marian had already been some months in residence before they met.

It was their first meeting since Theodore's

proposal and Sabina's flight. Marian, who at first was self-conscious, and disposed to think that Guy had deliberately held aloof in deference to Sabina, soon discovered that he was still unaware that there was any need for reserve in their relationship. She was shocked by the change in him. He had grown careless of his personal appearance, and was grossly neglecting his health. Further, he had the air of a man living in solitude. He was like a person who, having lived for some time in a badly-lighted room, comes blinking into the sun. He walked back with her to the edge of the park, gradually warming to her friendliness. She once or twice endeavoured to enquire after Sabina, but Guy would talk only of his symphony.

At parting he yielded to a sudden impulse, and asked whether she would come to the cottage on the following day in order to hear it. It seemed as though she had been sent to him that day by a special providence. He had desired above all things the judgment of a friend. Here was a friend who would be honest with him and a friend whose verdict might set his doubts at rest.

On the following day, during the meal which preceded the audition, Marian could only with difficulty prevent herself from yielding to an inward panic. It was the kind of meal which was only too usual at the cottage, consisting mainly of food extracted from tins and moistened with strong tea. The room, in its customary confusion, abundantly testified to the fact that Guy had long ago dismissed the woman who used to help with the cottage work. He was by turns irrelevantly

gay and needlessly intense. Marian felt that she was assisting at a crisis. The fact that he wanted her to tell him what she thought of his music, and that he had delivered his invitation in queer accents of deprecation, allowed her to see the state of his mind. He had fanatically aspired, but he already doubted.

It was Guy's birthday, and, when they turned to the piano he played first some French music which Marian had brought him as a gift. He realised enviously how precisely the Frenchman had expressed exactly what he desired. How pleasant it must be to have so little to say and to be able to turn it so neatly. He shut the book, and they talked uneasily about the music he had played. Then abruptly he seized his score. It was blotted and thumbed and written in a shorthand which few but the composer could read in its present state. It was stained with food and blotched with grease from the candles.

He played for half an hour, but he felt, almost at once, that he had failed. He compared, as he played, with increasing dismay, the music of which he had dreamed with the music he had achieved.

Marian was frankly puzzled. Here and there she caught a hint of the beauty that had evaded him. But for the most part she could only feel that Guy, who had been living in a paradise of disembodied ideas, had been unable to give them a local habitation. Thus might a throng of spirits, called suddenly to earth, catch up such garments as fell in their way and walk the earth demeaned and commonplace.

Convinced at last of the futility of his performance, Guy ceased playing. For a moment there was silence in the room. They heard the wind stirring the trees outside, and the fire rustling in the grate. Then Guy abruptly lifted his eyes and resentfully confronted his sentence. In Marian's looks he surprised compassion and the desire to encourage him afresh.

"Why don't you tell me it's no good," he said at last.

"There are parts of it," she began.

But she could not continue under his steady look.

"You think I've been wasting my time," he said.

Marian laid a hand upon his sleeve.

"Why not come back to us, Guy? You have shut yourself up too long. You are losing touch with life."

Guy pressed the hand which rested on his sleeve.

They remained for a moment without speaking. Their attitude declared an old intimacy renewed under the pressure of a strong emotion.

§ 4

A shadow fell across the threshold of the open door. Neither of them perceived it, or looked up to see what it was that came between them and the waning light. It might have been just one of the many shadows of nightfall. The shadow remained a moment, and then light and rapid steps were heard in the garden. Guy rose and went to the window. Yet another shadow seemed to glide away into the wood.

"I could have sworn somebody was in the garden," he said, returning to the fire.

A few minutes later Guy accompanied Marian back to Old Place. A storm was threatened from where the sun had left low clouds topped with vivid light, and a damp chill was in the air. Marian was home well before these premonitions were really alarming, but Guy thought it wise to lose no time in getting back to the cottage.

For some time he busied himself with household duties, and afterwards sat brooding before a replenished fire. He looked at himself that evening with an unusual steadiness. He had renounced the respectable world. He possessed in return a wife who was absent and a symphony which he would never wish to hear performed.

On the whole he was not getting much from life. There were also minor worries. Finance was one of them. Last time he had gone to town he had not even been able to buy Mrs. Basing the usual box of cigarettes, in spite of the fact that he had paid none of his debts, public or private.

Marian was right. As a practitioner of independence and the solitary life he was a failure.

He must reconstruct himself. So far he had yielded too easily to the passion of the moment. He had to achieve a broader vision of things, to live wisely in the world and to obtain inward peace for the work he wished to do. He would begin with the beloved girl who would soon be ready to rejoin him. They must somehow achieve an understanding which would leave no room for the rankling imperfection of their last encounter. He

must prevail with her to leave behind all that was sullen and incommunicable in their life.

He drew a sheet of paper towards him and began to write to her. He said first that he needed her. He asked whether she was not yet ready to come back. He went on to explain as well as he could his present state of mind.

He was diverted by the fall of the first heavy drops of the storm. He went to the window and looked out. The last light was leaving the sky. The wood on the further side of the road tossed under a squall which in another moment smote the cottage and brought with it the premonitory wet chill of rain. He gave thought to Marian in the house with double windows. She would be dressing for dinner in a warm room. She would hardly hear the rain which shortly would lash the frail walls of the cottage or the wind which would shake his walls. She would be hardly conscious of the deep gloom which was falling from the sky, of the helplessness with which those sombre trees and the quiet creatures of the wood awaited the inevitable rage which would be loosened upon them from the further side of the hill.

The squall passed and the rain followed. Guy remained by the open window, listening to the noise it made as it passed down the hill. The thunder hung off distantly a moment; but, led by a flash of lightning, arrived close upon the track of the rain.

For five minutes there was an uproar in the wood. Then a silence fell owing to a sudden and transitory lull. Guy was about to close the window when

this silence was broken by a cry. It came from the wood, shrill and with terror in it. Guy remembered the shadow which had glided into the wood that afternoon. He caught up his hat and hurried in the direction of the cry.

Before he had got thirty yards from the door the rain returned, and with it a wind which lashed the bracken and shook water from the trees. The cry was repeated as he ran at a venture down the path which led towards the open glade. He arrived upon the edge of the clearing just as a vivid flash of lightning brought its thunder immediately in train. Blinded by the darkness which followed, he ran towards the great beech in the centre. By the light of the flash he had seen a figure running. There was another cry which caused him to shiver as he ran.

CHAPTER XIII

§ I

MANY times, before Guy had come to Steyning, Sabina had been on the point of returning to Brambletye, but always at the last she was withheld, partly by pride and partly by the memory of his fatal saying.

"We cannot go on like this."

The words recurred continually. They had made her realise how much she was making him suffer. Thus she had drawn equally upon the bitterness and sweetness of her nature in fortifying her decision to leave him free for a while.

After his visit, however, she had decided to return at the earliest possible moment. Her sister's baby was born about six weeks afterwards, and Sabina made arrangements to go to Brambletye and to surprise Guy upon his birthday (which was due in a few days), leaving Raymond for the moment with her sister.

Having made up her mind to visit him on that day, she could not be turned aside, though she was forced to admit to her sister before starting that she was feeling far from well. She shivered even in the sun. Her sister had urged her not to go. But Sabina's mind troubled her more than her body, and the cure for her mind lay in this journey she had decided to take.

The day came without a word from Guy. She arrived by train and walked to the cottage from the local station. It was high afternoon when she reached the wood. She walked to the cottage door with a dry mouth and a beating heart. She saw that smoke rose from the chimney, and that the door was open. Something prompted her to make no noise as she came. She wanted, if possible, to see Guy as he lived when unconscious of her presence.

When she looked through the door Guy had his hand upon the hand of Marian. There had clearly been between them something which had left them deeply moved.

§ 2

Sick with resentment Sabina turned and walked rapidly into the wood.

Scarcely a day had passed in which she had not brooded upon her separation from Guy. Alternately she had suffered contrition for the loneliness in which she had left him and resentment at the way in which he had accepted her desertion. She returned to find him engrossed by the intimacy she had always feared. She assumed that the scene she now saw was part of his normal life.

She left the path and hid herself in the undergrowth. She wanted to be quiet, to discover exactly how hard this discovery was to bear. She sat still with her face buried in her hands, tearlessly probing into her consciousness as a sufferer will probe an aching tooth.

She did not stir, even when she heard steps in

the wood and knew that Guy and Marian were passing through on their way to Old Place.

A gust of wind heavy with raindrops struck her at last, and she recovered sufficiently to note with a tremor that it was almost dark and that a storm was threatened. She rose to her feet stiff with cold. In spite of the unhappiness, which seemed beyond anything she would ever feel again, she was already menaced with an emotion sharper and more compelling. Beside the new terror, which began to possess her, of being benighted among the trees, her previous condition seemed almost blessed. She hastily brushed her dress, and, darting a nervous look round, she began to walk rapidly in the direction of the path.

In a growing panic she found it increasingly difficult to advance. The undergrowth thickened where she expected it to give way to the open glade. She turned about and realised that she had lost her sense of direction. She heard thunder, and the dull sound added to her sense of the darkness which was closing upon her. She pushed her way desperately through the likeliest gap of the circle in which she stood.

Before the storm broke she was baffled and fighting hard to retain some little presence of mind. It was a losing battle, and soon she was moving wildly about the wood, resisting only with difficulty the temptation to scream. She was restrained by the dread she had of hearing her own voice in that place. She had a feeling that, if she screamed, she would lose all control of herself, and that the wood would be immediately alive with presences.

Then suddenly the rain charged down from the sky. For a moment she cowered under the storm, and then, sobbing with fright, she dashed wildly at a run through the streaming bracken.

Her skirt was wet through in a moment, and, clinging about her legs, brought her down heavily from time to time. Struggling frantically forward she was at last unable to withhold her cry, and almost simultaneously she burst from the undergrowth into the beech glade.

It was as though her cry had brought her there, and she stood on the edge of the clearing, staring into the dusk as though some act of magic had been performed. She ran into the open, and cried out again as she ran. A flash of lightning showed her that she was running towards the great beech. The dazzling light revealed the tree as though waiting to receive her, its smooth limbs spread to embrace her as she came, and, when darkness returned, she felt that the trees about her were malignant with a life inexorably hostile. She tried to check herself. In the act she stumbled and fell, and, endeavouring to rise, found that she grasped a root of the tree itself. She screamed again, with a note of fear in her voice more urgent than any she had yet emitted.

§ 3

When Guy reached her she lay apparently senseless on the ground. He had nothing with him that could shield her from the rain, and he was himself wet to the skin. He called her urgently and pressed her in his arms

Another flash of lightning, which flickered for an appreciable time, showed him that there was a film upon her eyes. Her teeth chattered, and, as she tried to speak, her breath came in gasps from the cold water which drenched her clothes. Guy could well guess the wretchedness of her physical condition from the effect upon himself of less than two minutes in that icy deluge. He lifted her, and carried her to the cottage with all the speed he could make.

He put her in his chair before the fire and ran upstairs for blankets and brandy. When he returned she was on her knees before the blaze shivering and moaning with cold. He began at once to remove her things. She could only sob, as he tore at her saturated clothing, saying she wished she was dead, and wanted only to be left alone.

He made her drink brandy in hot water. He rubbed her dry, and put her into a cocoon of blankets, and piled logs on the fire. But she grew continually more inert. He feared she was about to die. He felt her slipping away from him and implored her to come back. Then he realised that she had fainted. He chafed her hands and laid her flat on the floor. She came to herself very soon with a drawing of the breath that frightened him.

Once more he made her comfortable in the chair, and told her he must get a doctor. He would run to the neighbouring cottage and ask if someone could go to Old Place. She clung to him and begged him not to leave her. He realised with horror that she did not seem altogether to know

who he was, and that her eyes, when she looked at him, were strange. She glanced continually towards the door.

“Keep it out,” she whispered. “Keep it out.”

She almost infected him with her fear of the evil tree. The way she spoke of it invested it with such life that he half expected to hear it come up out of the wood, and to see one of its smooth limbs push through the window.

Guy waited by her side, his wet clothes hanging heavy on him until, at the end of about an hour, she fell into a stupor. Then, praying that she would not notice his absence, he stole from the cottage and ran rapidly to call his neighbour. The storm had passed and the man said he would go at once to Old Place.

When Guy returned Sabina was still lying as he left her. He changed his clothes and waited in an agony of impatience for the doctor. Soon she began again to talk—not now of the terror in the wood, but of their life together. Her talk was incoherent; but now and then a phrase, in which her love, darkened with misgivings but divine beyond reach of ridicule, thrust him to the heart.

The doctor arrived before midnight. He found her not only in high fever, but threatened with pneumonia. A fire was lighted in the bedroom, and she was carried up. The doctor promised that a nurse should be sent as soon as possible.

§ 4

Three days later, without once having regained consciousness, she died. It was midnight, and

Guy was sleeping for the first time since he had found her, when the nurse came to him with the news. He saw it at once in the nurse's face, and went upstairs.

He had never before been confronted with death, nor could he think of this as death now that he beheld it. There was nothing here mysterious or terrible. There was no majesty or anything that inspired him with awe or any kind of fear. This was not death, but a girl who would never speak to him or know him again, who had made him suffer, in whom he had delighted, to whom he had been compassionate and cruel. And all the things he might have said to her if their hearts had been as close as he now desired, and all the care he might have added to the care he had actually bestowed upon her, reproached him. Everything he had not done for her, or failed to give her of all the things which now seemed to have been her due, up to that last moment in which he had lain unresponsively beside her on the night before she left him, came to accuse him. And he could only feel the pity of it.

Instinctively he feared to touch her, lest he should realise that this was not Sabina who had just escaped him, but an empty shell, in which death alone resided. At dawn he was still gazing at the frail face of the girl he loved, from which all petulance had been smoothed away, whose lips seemed about to break into the faint smile he had often himself evoked within that very room and had often divined to be there as she lay beside him in the darkness. At dawn, however, the candles

faded, and a whiter light showed grey upon the still figure he had watched so long. It seemed as though she were really dying now, who had hitherto been absent only. He bent in sudden anguish and kissed her. Raising his head from the awful strangeness of her cold cheek, he looked again. Sabina was no longer there. He was looking only in the face of death.

BOOK III.



CHAPTER I

§ I

GUY broke down immediately after the funeral, partly from the effects of careless living, and partly from nervous exhaustion.

He had returned to his work, and was staying in his rooms at Hampstead. One morning he awoke with an illusion that he had become unusually light-hearted. His landlady found him alarmingly incoherent and went to Fern Cottage to warn Aunt Helen of his condition. When she returned, however, Guy was not to be found. After breakfast, which he had been unable to eat, he had started for Charing Cross.

It was a fine morning, but he shivered continually. He visited a bar and called for brandy. He felt better after that, and leaving the bar, walked towards the river and along the Embankment to Westminster. The sun was warm, and the river swept giddily round the piers of the bridge. He watched the shining eddies of water till suddenly he had to turn round to avoid the sensation that the bridge itself was revolving on the sliding surface of the tide.

His eye fell upon a familiar stretch of painted flagstones. He had often stood on that same spot looking up and down the river while changing lights played upon a picture which was rarely the

same. He knew well those painted flagstones, and the man who sat on guard beside them with his hat upturned for pennies. There was a picture of Nelson, a schooner correct in all its details, a study of surf and seagulls. They were nearly all of them sea pieces. The artist was an old sailor, to whom Guy had often thrown a contributory sixpence.

The old man had left his place for a moment, refreshment being necessary. The hat remained expectantly upturned, but the little square of sacking, where the man usually sat beside his handiwork, was vacant.

Guy looked vaguely at the little square of sacking. He felt it was wrong that no one should be sitting there at the receipt of custom, and he felt that somehow he must, for a while at any rate, sit down, if only to still a trembling at the knees which had begun to worry him. He decided that he must look after the business of his ancient friend during his absence.

§ 2

Sitting upon the little square of sacking was not unpleasant. The sun was now so warm that a fine moisture broke out upon Guy's forehead from the mere effort of adjusting himself correctly. It was fun to watch the people as they went by. He began to wonder, as they came, how they would behave. Some, he noted, passed on as though they did not see the pictures on the pavement, because they did not want to throw a penny into the hat. He wondered whether it was because they thought

they ought not to look at the pictures without paying, or whether they pretended not to notice the pictures because they did not want people to think they were mean to pass the old man by without offering a penny. That was a funny idea, because the old man was not there. He tried to be sure that he really was Guy Reval and not the old man he was impersonating, and he suddenly became horribly afraid that he was losing himself.

At this moment a group of men came from Palace Yard and stood for a while at the end of the bridge. Three of them, having some point to discuss, began to walk to and fro upon the bridge before separating.

Guy watched the three men with vague curiosity as they passed. They were unlike the other passers-by, being so engrossed in their conversation that they really did not see him. Besides, at least two of them were personally known to him. One of them was Theodore. Guy was not astonished. Why should he be? Theodore was always going into the House of Commons. The other one was familiar too. It was Henderson.

They passed twice without noticing him. He wondered what they would do if their attention were called to the upturned cap. Would they take pity on an old man who chalked on the flagstones for a livelihood? Seeing they were about to pass for a third time, he pushed the old man's cap well out into the middle of the pavement where they would be bound to see it.

Theodore, in earnest conversation with a junior member of the cabinet, suddenly saw that he was

about to tread upon a soiled and greasy cap containing some pennies. He looked aside to see what this might mean, and saw Guy sitting on the little square of sacking. Guy looked like a sage awaiting the result of a test which should search humanity to the marrow. Theodore observed that his brother was unshaven and flushed ; that he was without a hat ; that his eyes were bright and vague with fever. He turned a moment and pressed Henderson's arm. Henderson looked at Guy and hurried on with his companion.

A cab happened to be passing and Theodore summoned it.

" Guy," he asked peremptorily. " How on earth did you get here ? "

Guy did not know. He wanted to say that he had come by water, but he could not put it into very good English. On the other hand he was immensely attracted by the cab. By a rare chance it happened to be one of the few surviving hansoms.

" Rather like a chariot," he said vaguely, as his brother helped him to rise.

He was driven to a nursing home, where he was carefully watched and nursed for seven or eight weeks. Thereafter he was transferred to Old Place, in order that he might have the benefit of country air and pleasant surroundings.

§ 3

When at last Guy returned, convalescent, to the cottage at Brambletye, his first thoughts were for Raymond. He recalled that, just before Sabina had taken Raymond away, he had begun to see in

the eyes of his child a look of recognition, and on his child's face a smile that was unmistakably for him. The stir of his heart under those looks and smiles had hitherto been smothered by emotions more urgent. He had so far thought of his child mainly as belonging to Sabina, and, when Sabina went, it had seemed natural that the child should go too. Often during his illness, however, those looks and smiles recurred to him. He wondered why he had not missed them before, and why he had been content to leave his boy even for a few weeks with the sister of his dead wife.

He went to Steyning himself to bring Raymond away, and upon an evening some three months after the death of Sabina, as he sat with his brother at the cottage, he was happy to think that the boy was sleeping just above their heads in a cot, which he had borrowed from Lady Melsham. He had carried it down to the cottage on his own shoulders that very day, manifestly scandalising two nursemaids and the under-gardener, who saw him waving their mistress a casual adieu, grinning broadly through the framework of the cot as through a horse-collar.

§ 4

It was some time, that evening, before he would speak of anything but Raymond. He insisted that the boy had recognised him in a moment, in spite of over a year's absence from his father. He gave Theodore a complete version of all that the child had said on his way to the cottage, and demanded generally of heaven what he had done to have such a beautiful boy.

"I'm really beginning to feel like a father," he concluded.

The brothers were smoking, and Guy puffed for a moment in silence.

"It's a fine thing to be a father," he added suddenly.

"It's a responsibility," said Theodore.

"That means earning more money, I suppose," said Guy.

"You can easily do it," said Theodore. "The job is waiting."

Theodore was referring to the affair which had brought him that day to the cottage. One of his political friends had a substantial interest in a firm of musical publishers. The firm required a young man who might ultimately be admitted as a junior partner, and could in time be trusted to act in the absence of his chief. Theodore had secured the first refusal of this opening for his brother.

He pointed out that here, at his brother's feet, was a bridge whereby he could return from his solitude to activities reasonably lucrative and sociable. Would he or would he not come back to his friends?

Guy received the offer calmly, with no very strong feeling for or against it. He said that he was rather inclined to accept it. Perhaps it would be better to listen to those who had taken such good care of him during the last few months, to turn away from disastrous memories and start afresh. In acting for himself he had so conspicuously failed. He could not think of Sabina without wincing as at the memory of a physical

pain. They had suffered so abominably ; and, since he had seen her dead, he had felt her share of the suffering as never before. Just before his breakdown he had sat for hours under the great beech, wishing that he could get some message to her of tenderness and understanding. He now felt for her in a way that transcended anything they had said or done in the effort to express it.

The silence between the brothers was broken at last by Guy rising from his chair and knocking the ashes from his pipe. He put his hand on his brother's shoulder.

"Theo," he said, "you're a dear chap. I've often wanted to say it. But I don't suppose I shall ever say it again."

Theodore was glowing inwardly, but he merely smiled and said : "I'm glad you mentioned it."

Then he saw that his brother was looking at him with an unusual intensity, and he felt the grip tighten on his shoulder.

"I want you to know," said Guy, "that I really loved Sabina. I can't bear to think how it ended. I can never be sorry that we met, though neither of us was really happy. We never seemed to say or do what we intended. She never expressed herself. Something came between and made it impossible. Yet I should know her spirit if I saw it among millions. I know that, though she was unable to reveal herself to me, she was the simplest and sweetest being I shall ever meet. I shall always adore her memory. I want you to know that, Theo. It seems only fair to her that somebody should know."

Theodore looked almost with awe at the haggard, exalted face of his brother. Guy spoke as though, at the end of much brooding, he must find some relief for his emotion. It was the first time he had ever spoken seriously to his brother without leaving in view a possible retreat into mockery. But to-night there was no mischief in his eyes.

Theodore met him without embarrassment.

"You need hardly have told me, Guy," he said.
"She was the dearest child."

§ 5

After his brother had gone, Guy sat smoking in the garden thinking of the offer he had received. At the far end of the plot, the woodcutter's wife, who was now installed at Brambletye as a house-keeper, was turning the hard earth and breaking it tirelessly with her spade. Months ago Guy had himself begun to dig up that bed under the eyes of Sabina, who had sat on the garden stool beside him. There was the stool, itself. It had not been moved, but had stood through the rains and under the sun which had warped and blanched it. At every turn he saw something which recalled a memory equally vivid. There was nothing here she had not touched or handled; no place where he could not see her suddenly about some intimate business of their daily life. The tree against which he leaned stood upon the edge of the wood. In a hollow of the trunk wasps had nested during the previous year. He had one night tried, with Sabina, to destroy them with brimstone. He could see her face now in the light of the lantern, her hair

making a yellow haze where it was blown like spray over her forehead, her lips parted with excitement as they crouched and listened to the angry humming inside the hole. They had been happy that evening, and had talked late into the night, while Raymond had kicked and stirred and sighed, dreaming like a young dog in his sleep. So long as he stayed at Brambletye he would be met with such memories at every turn.

He rose and walked into the wood. Beside the great beech he paused a moment. Then he walked on, and before reaching Old Place, turned aside and took a less worn path which led him down into a valley and up again to the church tower which could be seen from the higher windows of Old Place. Under this tower Sabina was buried. It was a picturesque tower of grey stone with a short timber spire, warped and weather-tiled. Hating to see fresh flowers withering in churchyards, he had planted her grave himself with some of her favourite roses from the garden. They grew low and bushy and bloomed late into the season. Here for a long while he remained, till night had fallen and the white blossoms were pale in the darkness.

Two decisions gradually formed in his mind. He would not at once leave Brambletye. He wanted time to measure what he had lost and to find a meaning in it. He could not treat his life with Sabina there and her tragic death as an accidental chapter in his existence from which to escape hastily to something different. He felt that somehow he owed it to her memory to stay with her awhile in that place and to begin his life anew

with a full understanding of the bitter story in which he had borne so helpless a part.

His second decision was more of the brain than of the heart. He would accept Theodore's offer of a business appointment. Theodore had shown him an easy way to secure prosperity and an assured position, a way which led him from sorrowful memories back to his friends. Above all, it would lead him back to Marian, the friend under whose eyes he had lately come back to the normal world after his illness, whom he felt to be part of the order and comfort towards which he was listlessly drawn. He perceived the advantages of this course, and realised the point of view of those who would unite in urging it upon him. Nevertheless, in the obscurity of his heart, where all that is irrational and unconfessed takes refuge, he had the same feeling about it as he had about leaving Brambletye. He had failed, but ought he so easily to run away from his failure? Ought he not to make a resolute and wise effort to succeed where he had casually blundered? Should he surrender so easily his aspiration towards independence? Might he not remain isolated and free, not in the old arrogant spirit, but in a growing conviction of his dedication to something impersonal and exalted? He had a gift of expression which he had never really tested. He felt within himself, intermittently and darkly, the will to create something which might endure. Should these aspirations not be put to a further and a more searching test than he had hitherto made of them?

These motives were, for the moment, latent

rather than declared. He decided to take the broad and obvious way which led him back to the sane and comfortable world.

CHAPTER II

§ I

SOME weeks after his conversation with Theodore Guy walked into the private room of Henderson at the office of the *Moderator*.

Henderson beheld a very different apparition from that which had affronted his eyes when last he had seen Guy. Illness had imparted to Guy's face a fugitive pallor and an emaciation from which he had not yet recovered. By the doctor's orders his hair had been cut close and was not yet grown to its ordinary length. The big head, which had seemed merely exuberant, now conveyed a suggestion of intellectual power.

"There should be something considerable in that fellow's skull," thought Henderson, as he waited for his former contributor to explain himself. The blue eyes kindled in the old way as they lit on Henderson, but shining from under that pale and rather serious brow their light appeared almost celestial. Guy had in his hand a bowler hat of the latest shape, purchased that morning on his way to the office. It had suddenly occurred to him that Henderson would like to see him with a bowler hat.

"I have come," said Guy, "to offer you my services as musical critic."

"Indeed," said Henderson

"There is a great deal requiring to be publicly said about modern music," said Guy. "And the *Moderator* is the review to say it.

Henderson was expecting an impertinent petition from Guy to be re-instated, and he had intended inexorably to refuse. But he hardly knew how to deal with a serene offer of service which ignored the past.

"Let me remind you," said Henderson at last, "that you were once a contributor to this Review."

"For that, sir, I owe you an apology and some amends."

Henderson hesitated a moment. Guy spoke firmly and quietly. He was neither abject in his apology nor insolent in his aspiration. There were at least two aspiring rivals of Henderson in weekly journalism who would jump at the chance of such a man.

"Very well," said Henderson. "I will expect your first article next week."

Guy rose tranquilly and shook hands.

§ 2

Thus did Guy resume his place among the serious writers of the day.

The next two years of his life passed almost without event. He consolidated his position as a critic, and he mastered his business as a musical publisher. During the whole of this period he remained at Brambletye, whither he returned almost daily to Raymond. The two were inseparable when Guy was at home.

Guy would often sit under the great beech

watching Raymond as he peered after the birds and rabbits, or came to chatter of his discoveries, delighting in the boy's clear tones, his sudden use of an unexpected word, his tiny figure fronting so many novelties erect and nimble and unafraid. At these times his life in town seemed unsubstantial. The reality was in these woods, where he had carried his wife home through the storm, and where his boy, bringing him nuts or berries or quaint descriptions of something seen for the first time, looked up at him with a face in which she lived again. Raymond had his mother's dark eyes, and, what was more moving to see, he had her quiver of the lips when he was hurt. To Guy, as he sat under the big tree, the boy, rustling among the leaves and bracken, or suddenly intent upon some absorbing discovery, seemed an expression of the union which he and Sabina had never themselves in clear terms achieved. The child, with his great physical beauty, his serious intensity of emotion, his bright humour, his fundamental sweetness and unfailing courage, expressed what each of them would have shown the other, had it lain within their ability.

Guy remained profoundly susceptible to the influence of the place. Under the firm hand of his housekeeper, Brambletye had again the neatness which belonged to it when Sabina had been there. Every object he saw or handled started a memory, and often he would once more grieve to think that, by just a little more understanding, they might have grown wise and happy together. The difficulties which had estranged them seemed now un-

real, and he believed that if she could now return, their love would resolve the old disharmonies. He exaggerated his obtuseness to the appeal of his dead darling ; the appeal which she had thwarted rather than expressed in their life together, but which, nevertheless had constantly lived in his spirit's ear.

Gradually, however, present life intruded upon his memories, and he began to measure what remained with him after his great disaster.

There was Raymond. There was his work in London. There was Marian at Old Place.

§ 3

For Guy, Marian was a friend to whom he might talk with a full heart and a free tongue. Except for his declaration to Theodore he never mentioned his wife's name to anyone but Marian. Marian found a sad security in these conversations. Guy spoke as a man married to his memories. So long as he spoke of Sabina he was beyond reach of her most secret wish, a man dedicated elsewhere who might be safely loved.

Guy had come back to the normal world under the eyes of Marian. She was a part of the order and comfort to which he seemed bound, after the failure of his marriage, to return. As an invalid he had felt secure when she was near, and this feeling had not entirely passed with his recovery. She produced in him a disposition to purr. Lady Melsham noted that, on calling at Old Place, his eyes naturally wandered in search of her husband's secretary. She was not displeased ; and said to

some of her friends, jumping to far conclusions, that "it was the best thing that could happen."

Not long after Lady Melsham had thus delivered herself, Guy fell into a panic about Raymond. Raymond had begun to wake up in the night with a troublesome cough, and other symptoms of a severe cold. Guy had a fire lit in the bedroom, and left the strictest orders about keeping the boy warm and well covered. On the third night Raymond gravely informed him that during the day he had been making noises like a chicken, and proceeded at once to illustrate his new accomplishment. Guy hurried him between the blankets, wondering whether babies ever died of whooping cough. The housekeeper assured him that whooping cough never killed a child who was really strong.

Some days later, at about ten o'clock in the evening, Guy thought he had good reason to distrust his housekeeper, as he held Raymond in his arms, struggling for breath, and almost black in the face. He demanded a doctor; and when the housekeeper said she could not possibly get one at that time of night, and that a bath of mustard and water would be more to the point, Guy, as soon as Raymond seemed a little better, decided to run to Old Place and give the alarm.

He arrived breathless, and a telephone message was sent at once to the local man.

On starting back, he asked Marian to come with him. It was a sudden impulse, obeyed without reflection. Marian seized a scarf and came. When they reached the cottage Raymond was attacked by a fresh paroxysm, and Marian took him up and

wiped the foam from his lips. The fit passed and the boy went almost immediately to sleep in her arms.

The sight of Marian holding Raymond so securely, coming after the fright he had suffered, disposed Guy to be extravagantly grateful.

"It was dear of you to come;" he suddenly exclaimed.

She looked up from the boy, and said evasively.

"I think he's got over the worst of it."

Guy felt that he had embarrassed her by his sudden declaration; and he, too, was moved.

The doctor's car was in the road, and Guy went downstairs to meet him. The doctor, having looked at the child, was inclined to resent having been called so urgently for so little reason. He prescribed and left the cottage without ceremony, curtly informing Guy that whooping cough had often frightened people unduly.

"The good leech was distinctly short with me," said Guy, on returning to the room. "I'm under the impression that we've disgraced ourselves."

"The doctor," Marian retorted, "was a wretch."

She smiled to see Guy tucking up his precious child with a practised hand.

Again there came a shyness between them, and Guy felt that he must say something.

"Ray might have had the decency to cough horribly when the doctor was here," he said. "But he never looked better in his life."

They stood a moment beside the cot. There did not seem to be need for further anxiety.

"I must be getting back to Old Place," said Marian.

"I suppose so," said Guy.

She turned to pick up her scarf. Guy had an impulse to retain her, similar to the impulse which had prompted him to bring her with him to the cottage. He watched her twisting the scarf round her head.

"I wish you hadn't got to go, Marian," he said abruptly.

She turned to him with a faint colour.

"I can't very well stay, can I?" she said. There was a touch of resentment in her voice. His inveterate blindness to the fact that she was a woman (not only a woman but a woman who loved him) always hurt her, and more than usually to-night.

"Why not?" said Guy.

"Think it over," said Marian.

Guy saw that she was offended.

He put his hand on her arm. She drew it quickly away and took up her coat from the bed.

"What's the matter, Marian?" he said.

He looked hard for a light on the situation. At last he broke into a smile.

"You're not thinking," he protested, "that it wouldn't be correct for you to stay."

"Marian was re-arranging her scarf and had a brooch in her mouth, which gave to her next remark a quality oddly incisive.

"The idea may possibly have occurred to me," she said.

"But how absurd," said Guy.

Marian did not smile. She had finished her preparations and asked in her coolest tones, in sharp contrast with her heightened colour and quick breath, whether he would warn the house-keeper that he was seeing her home.

§ 4

On the way to Old Place Guy had time to meditate. It was not like Marian to raise the question of propriety.

As he walked silently beside her through the wood, scores of inconvenient possibilities took shape. The inconveniences were, in fact, likely to become intolerable. He wanted to be intimate with Marian, and she had made it difficult. It was not only what people might infer. It went deeper than that. Guy felt that what had just happened in the cottage, slight and undeclared as it was, had put a real barrier between them. He did not feel at ease walking by her side in the wood, estranged from her by his thoughts and yet susceptible to her presence. He watched her arm as it swung to her step and the faint gleam of her ungloved hand.

There was, it appeared, even a point of view from which it had not been right for Marian to come that summer afternoon to the cottage to hear him play. On that afternoon Sabina had seen them together, and had gone away to die. It had hitherto seemed absurd that Sabina should not have walked into the cottage and greeted them both as though it were the most natural thing in the world to see them thus together. But Marian,

in her present mood, hinted a justification of Sabina's conduct.

His mind slipped fast into confusion and he impulsively stopped.

"Marian," he began.

She did not slacken her pace, and he caught clumsily at her swinging arm.

"Look here, Marian," he said, in a man-to-man sort of voice, "Why have you suddenly begun to stand off. It's too ridiculous."

"I haven't the faintest notion what you're talking about," said Marian.

She already blamed herself for allowing a momentary resentment to look through the mask which for years she had successfully worn.

"You know very well what I'm talking about," said Guy. "You were offended by something I said at the cottage."

Marian tried to walk on, but could not bring herself actually to leave him. She turned back, wondering how she could ever have been so foolish as to provoke a scene.

"Really, Guy," she said, "there's nothing to be intense about. You apparently wanted to keep me up all night and I didn't think it necessary. Meanwhile you're not improving matters by standing still in the middle of this wood."

Guy moved forward in rather a worse mind than before. Marian was fencing with him, and the constraint between them had increased rather than diminished. They did not exchange another word till they reached the terrace at Old Place.

Marian made to dismiss him at the door as briefly

as possible ; but Guy was not yet ready to be dismissed. He arrested Marian's hand as she attempted to pull the house bell.

" You're not going to leave me like this," he said.

" Don't be ridiculous, Guy."

" If it's really necessary for us to be more conventional," said Guy, going straight to what he considered the point, " I'll try to realise it in future. It will be a great nuisance."

" You're exaggerating the whole affair," she said in a low voice.

" I'm exaggerating nothing," said Guy stubbornly. " We were both wretchedly uncomfortable in the wood just now. We can't go on like that."

" It won't happen again," said Marian.

" It's happening here and now," said Guy. " You've got me at arm's length."

Her answer was to raise her hand suddenly and pull the bell. It was an act of cowardice, but she felt that at all costs she must escape. She saw on Guy's face the look of a friend suddenly confronted with an unexpected treachery, and this goaded her to an honest declaration.

" At arm's length, Guy, it must be. Nothing else is possible."

Before Guy could grasp the significance of what she said, the door was opened. She entered the house, and the door closed again between them, without a word of good-night on either side.

§ 5

For a full minute Guy stood staring blankly at the closed door. He had an absurd impulse to

ring the bell in order that he might ask Marian to repeat her last remark. It hardly seemed possible that he could have rightly heard her. Why was it necessary for her henceforth to hold him at a distance? His mind, groping here and there, at last touched uncertainly upon the truth.

He began to walk back to the cottage. On reaching it he first looked at Raymond, and dismissed the housekeeper to her rest. Then, for a while, he sat in his bedroom, but at last, finding it almost impossible to sit still, he went downstairs and walked up and down the flagged path of the garden. It was a quiet night, and he could hear every sound in the cottage, even to the crackling of the fire in the room above.

Everything conspired, after that strange scene on the terrace, to convince him that Marian loved him. He looked back into the past, and found evidence that reached back to the Oxford days. For a moment he yielded to the inveterate coxcomb which appears in most men unexpectedly chosen. Then he dwelt upon the sentence of exclusion she had pronounced against him. He was too fond of her to be held perpetually at a distance. He had known that as he walked with her in the wood. There was an alternative which caused his step to fall more rapidly upon the flags.

He recalled the scene of the terrace. Virtually at the last she had confessed. She had incurred for truth's sake every hard name that can be levelled against a woman who gives herself away. She had done this in the fixed belief that what she had said had finally severed their friendship. She

would never, he knew, have said those words if she had expected him to offer courtship over the grave of the wife he had so recently lost. Nor did he yet desire to offer courtship. The thing had suddenly become not impossible, but, in the way of any immediate action or of any urgent feeling, stood emotions and memories with a prior right. Sabina had said that, if he were unmarried, Marian would have him. To walk from Sabina's grave in order to fulfil her prophecy was impossible.

Guy thought much, too, of Theodore's part in this. Theodore must have loved Marian from the first. He must have known her secret, which he had kept inviolate under continual provocation.

Thus Guy rose from an ignoble vanity, which whispered that Marian loved him, to a discerning humility which convicted him of having blundered blindly among those who had seen. He had imagined that the loss of Sabina had revealed to him the full extent of his folly. Now that he saw himself with the eyes of those who had been spectators of the tragi-comedy in which he had borne so naive a part, he wondered why he had not long ago been laughed from the world.

APTER III

§ I

THE firm of which Guy had now become an important member was noted for the catholicity of its endeavour. It was at present in that stage of its career, when, having developed commercially beyond its expectations, it began to feel that for the sake of further advertisement and in order to elevate the social status of its directors, it was advisable to progress also on the asesthetic side. For this purpose it began to need the assistance of musicians. The scheme with which Guy was primarily concerned was the publication of contemporary music, which had or had not received a public hearing, and was likely to increase the credit of the house. The discovery and selection of this music was his first pre-occupation.

To qualify technically for success in this business (as he told himself), Guy began to study systematically the art which he had hitherto approached casually and as an amateur. His new work brought him into touch with most of the practising or aspiring musicians in London, and he had the best advice at his disposal.

He had as yet no idea of resuming the effort towards self-expression he had made at Brambletye, and during the first two years of service with his firm he published nothing of his own composition except

a slender volume which was the result of accident rather than design.

Among the MSS. which came before him as publisher's reader he was struck one day by a piece of music, hardly more than a fragment, composed for the piano and inscribed "Christine Thorne." The music had little merit, but there was a hint of mystery, and Guy never omitted to see anyone who achieved anything at all distinctive.

He sent a note to the composer, who was in due occasion shown into the room where Guy sat daily among his files.

The composer proved to be a girl who could hardly be more than nineteen years of age. She did not come sensibly into the room, but stood awkwardly at the door with her back to the panels.

Her hair was of a massive gold, and was pushed transversely in a broad sweep from left to right across her forehead. The mystery which Guy had found in her music was in her eyes, which were at the same time secret and inquiring.

"You wrote this?" said Guy, after a moment's inspection of this unexpected figure, holding up the MS. which was on his desk.

"Yes," said the apparition.

There was a sullen finality in her utterance which somehow made it difficult for Guy to pursue his investigation.

"I am going to recommend its publication," he said.

The girl made no comment on this announcement, but Guy was obscurely aware of an emotional disturbance. The only visible sign was a hardly

perceptible flush, and lips that parted but failed to utter the words that nearly came.

"You do not play the piano," said Guy.

"No," said the girl.

She seemed, after a pause, to realise that his remark called for some astonishment; for she added:

"How do you know that I do not play the piano?"

"You do not compose for the piano like a pianist."

She made no comment on this, but looked at him in a kind of heavy wonder.

There was something familiar in the look.

"Haven't I seen you somewhere before?" Guy asked.

"You have passed me dozens of times," said the girl. "I belong to the firm."

"What do you do for us?" Guy asked.

"I sell music," said the girl.

"You are fond of Debussy," he said, accusing her.

"Yes."

"There is a passage here which is due entirely to him."

He crossed to the big piano, which almost filled his small office.

"It is a clever passage," Guy continued; "but it is derived. You must forget all about Debussy."

He played the passage, and then, to show how easy it was to imitate a master, he began to extemporise inventions in the manner of the composer.

"You mustn't write like Debussy," he admonished her, as he played.

He came slowly to a stop, however, becoming aware in his companion of a dark humiliation. She stood still, with her eyes on the floor, deeply dejected by the ease with which he demonstrated that her music was a plagiarism.

"Where did you learn your music?" he asked abruptly.

Guy, after diligent inquisition, ascertained that her father played in an orchestra, that she had heard and read a great deal of music, that she was studying the violin and paying for her lessons with money earned in the shop.

He began to speak of the publication of her MS.

She asked to see it; and, when he handed it to her, tore it across with an abrupt and awkward gesture, and laid it on the table. Her act was characterised by an uncouth energy, the more striking as it broke for an instant the almost oppressive inertia of her manner.

"Thank you for my lesson," she said, turning to leave the room without looking at him.

"That's not the way to go," Guy expostulated. She looked at him in black defiance.

"Why don't you compose music yourself?" she challenged him. "You have shown me how easy it is."

She went from the room abruptly, leaving her MS. on the table.

This strange challenge was the origin of the only musical work published by Guy during his service with the firm. It consisted of a series of sketches

loosely strung together, in which the manner and sometimes the matter of the more prominent composers of the day was ingeniously imitated. The small volume had a success of a kind wholly unexpected by its author. Written in a spirit of irony, and accepted in this spirit by the connoisseurs, it was also successful with a public which received it seriously and, with cheek on hand, were ready to be moved almost to tears by some of its drollest passages.

§ 2

Guy at last left Brambletye and found permanent quarters in London. It was late October when he moved away. As he sat with Raymond in the garden, waiting for the carrier to take them and their luggage to the station, the leaves were skimming down from the trees and eddying upon the flagstones. He had shut the door of the cottage and no smoke came from the chimney. Already it looked lifeless and abandoned. It reminded him of the moment in which he had felt the outer coldness of death on Sabina's cheek. He shivered, and told himself that he was morbid. It was absurd for him to cling to a place where he had loved and aspired impossibly beyond his powers. He had finished with Brambletye, and was a publisher. He was dining again with Henderson. He belonged now to the sensible world where money was made and marriages arranged. How could all this be reconciled with a further sojourn in this haunted place?

And yet, when the cart came and he had climbed

into it with Raymond, he felt that the moment was decisive, and he could not feel that it was decisively right. The empty cottage reproached him as though for an act of treachery. It accused him of being false to his past, and to himself; and, as he moved away and rounded the bend of the road which cut it finally from view, he remained conscious of it sentimentally brooding upon his departure.

He took a small flat in Hampstead where he intended to live with Raymond. His establishment consisted of a working housekeeper and a nursemaid.

§ 3

Since the night with Marian at Old Place he had evaded Theodore, and he had not seen Aunt Helen. Theodore did not notice that Guy and Marian had ceased to meet; but Aunt Helen was both wiser and more aware.

She had long made up her mind that Guy and Marian should be married as soon as decency permitted. She firmly believed that Marian would make of him a happy and a prudent man. She heard with satisfaction of his decision to leave Brambletye, and, soon after he had moved into his flat, summoned him curtly to dinner, asking what she had done to be neglected for three complete months of the year. Guy said he would come, in the belief that Marian was still at Old Place.

He arrived early at Fern Cottage and the drawing-room was empty. For a while he sat silent beside the fire. The place brought Marian very near. Reason persuaded him towards Marian,

and behind reason was an unconscious instinct which urged him to turn from past memories to present experience. Life was at his elbow, insinuating happiness and presenting him with a radiant image of her who had that happiness to bestow. So delectable became this image, seen through a mist of thoughts not without a tinct of the rosy goddess, that the room in which he had so often had Marian for a companion took on an appreciable desolation from her absence.

He went to the piano. Marian's music lay there in a disorder which almost suggested her presence. Schumann fell open at his great Toccata. There, indeed, was the positive note—the throb of that life renewed in him which had already turned his thoughts towards her. He sat down to the piano and shattered the silence with the opening phrase in which the outward splendour of life is abruptly declared as a prelude to the obstinate rhythm of its deeper purpose.

§ 4

Marian was in her room. The crash of the music below was her first warning that Guy was in the house. Aunt Helen had been careful not to enlighten her.

For a moment she thought of escape. Then she reflected that the time for meeting him must come sooner or later. At the worst, it was simply a question of maintaining the distance she had put between them. Clearly she must go to him ; and she must go before Aunt Helen was there to make things worse.

She went downstairs, assuming an outward calm, but aware of a throbbing confusion within. Her decision had been briefly taken, and, when she entered the drawing-room, Guy was still in the middle of the toccata. He turned and saw her. Immediately he stopped playing, and, upon an eager impulse, went to her. Her coming gave reality to the thoughts which during the last weeks had prompted him continually to a closer fellowship. There was assuredly more than a tinct of the rosy goddess about her as she stood defensively in a flushed recoil. He found himself talking to her almost at random.

"Not at arm's length, Marian," he pleaded. "I never realised that I cared so much. I want you always, Marian. Will you, Marian, in a little while, marry me?"

Marian could not immediately realise that she was being wooed. She told herself almost incredulously that Guy was asking her to be his wife, and saying in effect that he loved her.

"Marian," he said, "I am asking you again. Will you be my wife?"

"Do you really care enough for that?"

For answer he took her by the hands and drew her close. She yielded doubtfully, until he had kissed her; but, for her, the kiss was decisive. She knew nothing of the pranks the blood of a young man facing towards life can play when the disposition is apt. She was assured by his kiss that he loved her as much as she desired; and, to his urgent question, repeated again as he held her she said, "Yes" without misgiving.

CHAPTER IV

§ I

IN the spring of the following year, Guy and Marian were married at Christ Church, Hampstead.

Perversely enough, the memories he successfully held at bay during the period of his betrothal victoriously possessed him during the wedding ceremony. As he sat with Theodore waiting for his bride, and later, as they stood together facing the altar, he must needs remember that other rite performed in a registrar's office at Abingdon. At Abingdon it had been a simpler and speedier affair altogether. He had stood before a table, and the girl beside him had worn a dark blue coat and skirt. Even as he listened to the officiating clergyman, who was making such terribly intimate and inexorable speeches out of the prayer book, and though he was acutely aware of Marian standing beside him, splendid in white satin, he could see the three parallel rows of black braid upon the dark blue coat and the small square pleats in the dark blue skirt. The moment surprised him with a double disloyalty, equally to the dead and to the living.

The moment passed, and soon he was walking to the church door with Mendelssohn brightly

insisting that this was the most obviously cheerful of all occasions in life.

The shadow of the dead woman which had fallen between them at the altar was with him again that night, and against his will he loved his bride as a changeling. Dismayed, he threw a veil over the cruel pranks of memory as Marian lay in his arms ; and over her, as she slept, he prayed that he might keep himself true in blood and spirit to the living woman and that even his memories might do her no further wrong.

And so began the paradox of their married love. Invocations to a relationship indissoluble and eternal were impossible without raising a dead rival to the living wife. He shunned an ecstasy which found him haunted by a pale intruder. Instinctively he kept his love for Marian away from the passionate levels where personal identity is lost and a perfect union achieved. Marian, on the other hand, prayed for the perfect union which alone could justify the triumph of her awakened senses. But she was too wise to ask for what was impossible. For the most part she practised philosophy and was content, though there were times when she felt the shame of a chaste woman, who, though her blood is sweet and her spirit pure, passionately surrenders herself in the knowledge that she is more loving than beloved.

They spent their honeymoon in a lonely house upon the south coast of England. The house was built upon a spit of shingle that lay between the sea and the waters of an estuary, which ran under their windows to form a circular haven surrounded

by marsh and cliff. There was no practicable approach to the house by road. Visitors crossed to it from the East by boat or scrambled for miles over heather cliffs and sandy dunes from the West. The house belonged to fishermen, who were among the last of their craft in these ancient waters. Guy and Marian were deliciously remote and idle ; and there, though they walked the earth only, it was possible to walk enchanted. In the mornings there were beaches of blown sand under the dunes, from which they could bathe and swim in a solitude made by sun and sea, and rimmed with little green hills or tiny purple alps of grass and heather. In the long warm afternoons there was the small boat with its red sail, in which they could pass from the haven to the open sea over a miniature bar of foam or fret a passage inland to a quiet English town, busy with river-craft. In the evening there were walks upon the cliff, or a new book from London ; and usually there was a last look from the lonely dark edge of the shingle spit to where distant lights guided the ships forth and back on the remoter waters.

Sometimes when Marian was tired, or engrossed by a book, Guy would slip from the house alone, and stand upon the extreme point of the spit where the confusing currents met. He liked it best when the night was wild and the wind rustled drily over the sand, driving it and sifting it and combing out the coarse rushes. He would sit in a sheltered hollow, at one with a scene in which he saw nothing but the dark shapes of hills which grew darker, seas from which the light was dying, a stray gleam

of water from the marshes, or the sky filling with stars. Invariably he faced towards the sea, from which one night Marian had turned with a shudder.

"*A woman wailing for her demon lover,*" she had quoted. "This would be just the place."

On one occasion, when, for some time, Guy had remained alone in this place, silent and reflective but unconscious of any definite thought, he suddenly felt as though something were intrusively demanding an expression of which he was only half aware. He caught himself saying :

"Here she might have lived. But she hated the trees."

He was sifting sand through his fingers at the time, and almost in terror he saw himself at a great distance, a tiny figure but distinct, sitting upon another beach, deserted and sun-lit, playing with the sand in just that way, and listening idly to someone who told him that she loved the sea.

He rose with a shiver, and, as he walked to the house, he turned back once or twice feeling that he was not unaccompanied.

§ 2

Guy and Marian, after spending nearly six weeks by the sea, moved thence straight into their new house at Ealing. They had chosen the house for space and comfort. It had an installation for central heating, double windows, and lofty rooms.

Every morning at half-past eight, Guy issued from the double doors of this pleasant house and

caught his train to the city. He wore a well-cut suit of a neat pattern, a shapely bowler hat and a dark overcoat. He carried good gloves, an umbrella faultlessly uprolled, and the *Daily Telegraph*. He had eaten an excellent breakfast, and had taken off the first edge of the day in agreeable interludes with Marian behind the coffee, with letters full of news, and with passages more or less facetious with Raymond, which began in the bath-room and ended at the garden gate. The journey up to town filled him with a pleasant sense of the marvellous solidity of his new position. He sat in his well-appointed first-class smoking carriage among men even more solid than himself, hearing comments on the money-market or the stock-exchange; and during these early days it was piquant. It was as though fundamentally he knew it for an enormous joke, and it was partly this that caused him to exaggerate the comfortable philistinism of his new life.

Theodore was a frequent visitor at the Ealing house. Sensitive to anything which touched Marian at all closely, he was not wholly at ease. He could not detect anything concretely wrong, except that Guy was almost too obtrusive in his declarations of felicity. The root of Theodore's uneasiness lay in a fear that Guy did not sufficiently value Marian. He was jealous of the enormous trust she had placed in his brother. She had preferred to risk disaster with Guy than to shelter with him. And even now, as he saw them together, outwardly happy, he felt that they were somehow insecure. He could even see—or was it his fancy?—

the shadow of a question in Marian's eyes, as unobserved she quietly watched Guy with his friends.

§ 3

Guy returned from his honeymoon to enjoy the success of his musical parodies. The book had appeared as he was on the point of leaving for the south coast. His enjoyment of its success was a complicated emotion. He was genuinely pleased that the musicians applauded him for the right reason (even some of the victims wrote him cordial letters). He was even more pleased that he should have demonstrated a favourite thesis with him, that imitation is the best and possibly the only satisfactory method of criticism. With the general public he did not know whether to be pleased or angry. As a cynical man of business (the character to which he chose to aspire) he was delighted, more particularly as his firm treated him with an immense respect as one who (though an artist) had actually produced something which for some reason or other the public wished to buy. Nevertheless, on more than one occasion, he was seen to behave almost rudely to people who congratulated him for the wrong reason, and to one fair patron of the arts, who had in her train most of the celebrated musicians of Europe, he replied without respect, when she wrote him a long letter upon the delicacy and depth of feeling he had shown in an amusing imitation of Puccini at his worst.

It was some time before he spoke again to the girl whose challenge had prompted him to this enterprise. They frequently encountered within

the precincts of the firm, but passed casually about their business. Guy once or twice made a movement towards her, but felt strangely embarrassed by a kind of still expectation in her attitude. Her torn MS. remained in his drawer.

Not long after his return, however, chance, as though pertinaciously bent upon ripening the acquaintance, again brought them together. Guy received a letter from the Principal of the School of Music which she was attending, inquiring whether it would not be possible to arrange in the near future for a preliminary public appearance of Miss Christine Thorne, a promising pupil who had lately made astonishing progress with the violin.

Guy mentioned the matter to the concert agent of the firm, who asked him to hear Miss Thorne and report upon her capabilities.

In due course she came to his room by appointment.

She showed no misgiving, but her silence seemed more than ever overcharged.

"You see, I took your advice," said Guy, indicating his parodies that lay on a table between them.

"I ought to congratulate you," said Christine.

It was impossible to tell whether this was irony or common form.

She took her violin from the case.

"You want me to play?" she abruptly inquired.

"We want, if possible, to arrange for you to play at one of our recitals."

With an awkward gesture, as though suddenly

prompted to release her suspense, she raised the violin and began to play.

Guy found himself, not without amazement, listening to the Chaconne of Sebastian Bach.

It seemed as though she had instinctively chosen something which might illustrate her musicianship without giving herself away. She was sullenly concentrated upon her music, as though it were natural for her to be absorbed into the abstract and the abstruse. Thus, thought Guy, might an oracle pronounce its riddles, understanding them but allowing none of its hearers to spell their human significance.

CHAPTER V.

§ I

ON a fine Spring Sunday morning, in the third year after they had settled down in the Ealing house, Marian awoke at an early hour in one of the pleasant bedrooms at Old Place. She had arrived with Guy on the previous afternoon in response to one of her frequent invitations from Lady Melsham.

The house reminded her of much that had happened before her marriage, and, last night, they had talked at length of Theodore's rapid progress in the House of Commons (he had now been a member for twelve months) and of his approaching marriage with the daughter of an eminent politician.

Theodore and his lady were also staying at Old Place for the week-end.

It was accordingly natural that Marian, as she lay listening to the birds under her window, should review with a steady eye the uneventful years of her married life.

Guy had attended constantly to his business, and he was now prosperous. Already he was thinking of a flat in town, where they might entertain their literary and musical friends.

And yet, as the sweet morning air came into her room, and the level sun-light slipped through her curtains and lay like a sword between floor and ceiling, Marian realised that she was far from

satisfied. It was worse than that. She was afraid. The mood was on her. It came upon her only occasionally. But it had to be reckoned with.

It was not that she and Guy were, it seemed, to have no children ; though that fact seemed somehow, when the mood was on, maliciously appropriate. Still less was it that she feared to lose Guy in the vulgar way. She trusted absolutely in his affection and faith. Her mood was the result of an impression that slowly but inevitably Guy was withdrawing from her for causes unfathomed. He had outlived his forced enthusiasm for a life devoted to business, and she divined that for some impenetrable reason she was disastrously implicated in this reaction from the Ealing experiment. It was as though he regarded her as part of that huge joke of being a householder which had ceased to amuse him and was now beginning to conflict with aspirations from which she was cruelly and unjustifiably excluded.

Nothing decisive had yet happened to reveal the rift. Guy himself knew less than the woman who so jealously watched him to what extent she was excluded. For the moment he was conscious merely of a vague discomfort, a tendency to look for distraction beyond the Ealing circle. For escape he had turned naturally to his music ; but, in his present state of divided allegiance, he could make no real progress in that direction. He started things and left them unfinished. He secluded himself for a few days, or even weeks, but invariably he returned dispirited to his ordinary business.

There was a sense in which Marian felt, now as when first they were married, that she had never really won him. She feared the solitude to which he sometimes retired. She feared his silence. She feared the strange unspoken intimacy in which he walked with Raymond. And the least hint of his withdrawal from the common life, however tentative, brought upon her the mood she feared.

These were straws, but, when the mood was on her, such straws blew thick upon the wind. During ordinary calm days they lay neglected in a corner of her mind.

Some of the straws had blown from Soho, where Guy had begun to frequent late parties in Bohemian flats. Marian did not disapprove of this Bohemian life or desire to keep Guy perpetually at home. The root of her uneasiness was strangely subtle. It lay rather in the knowledge that he did not greatly care for these distractions than in any fear that he was likely to be absorbed by them. She divined that he went to these parties, not because he really liked them, but because they ministered to the streak of wildness in him which she could neither touch nor tame. They were a kind of spiritual fidgeting.

§ 2

A slight movement caused her to turn her eye from the window. Guy was awake. He stretched his hand across to her and she gave him her own.

"Slept well?" he asked.

"Fairly," said Marian.

"Suppose we let in the sun," said Guy.

He jumped out of bed and drew the curtains, putting his head far out of the window. After a few moments he came and sat beside her.

"It's glorious out there," he said. "There's frost on the apple bark and drops shining in the blossom. There are swallows just under the roof. One of them flew out and made a draught down my back with his wings. The fields are still white and you could eat the fresh air. I'll tell you what, Marian, we must have a country estate at once. This is the stuff to wake you up every morning. Come and have a look."

He pulled at her hands and lifted her from the pillow, then reached for her slippers and gown. Together they looked out over the country. They could see Crowborough beacon and the dark line of Ashdown Forest. "We must give them the slip this morning," said Guy. "I vote we go right up to the forest. There is a bit of it not much more than four miles away."

Marian smiled and pressed his hand. Why was she so full of discontent? He was always trying to please her, and he would do anything to avoid giving her pain. He had not lost any of his old delight in her company.

"He would surrender everything to me," she thought; "everything except himself," she added in a bitter afterthought.

On their way out to the forest they passed Brambletye.

Guy had not seen the cottage since he left it with Raymond on the eve of his settling down in

London. Since then it had remained empty. The windows were cluttered with dust. The creepers had grown disorderly about it. The garden was a wilderness. Overhung with its lofty trees, it had a brooding, haunted look. Marian shivered as she passed. Guy once or twice turned to look at it with a curious wide glance, searching, almost expectant. He did not tell Marian a secret—one of the small secrets he had lately begun to have. Some twelve months ago he had bought Brambletye for a small sum, obeying a sudden impulse on seeing that it was being offered for sale as an untidy and unnecessary corner of the Melsham estate.

On the way home to lunch, Guy and Marian again took the familiar woodland path through the beech glade. Under the great beech they met Theodore and the lady to whom he was engaged. She was admiring the tree as they came up. There was a swift interplay of glances among the other three, in whose minds the past here sprang to life almost of necessity. Here Theodore had seen Marian sitting with his brother on the afternoon of Sabina's last foretelling of what had since occurred. Here Theodore and Marian had failed to become engaged. Here Sabina had run to her death. And now Guy saw his brother standing there with the stately girl who was to be his wife. It was an excellent marriage, a union of young intelligence and fair prospects with wealth and a place always high in the court circular. The girl was beautiful in her cold way. She had an assured manner which marked her out already for a successful

political hostess. Yet, as she admired the tree, with epithets which fitted as aptly as the neat fur toque upon her head, Theodore wished that Guy and Marian had not come to remind him that this was historic ground.

§ 3

Guy and Theodore came unexpectedly together again in the late afternoon. Both had started for a solitary walk before dinner. Drawn by a common lure, they met under the chimneys of Brambletye. Theodore arrived some time before his brother. Brooding on the fading story of the place, he had an odd feeling that in the old days, when the chimneys of Brambletye were warm, Guy had been more enviable (in the way that Theodore was prone to envy him) than he was at present. He saw again certain scenes in which his brother had figured. He was leading his wife back to her home on the dark night of her flight from school, or sitting alone and dishevelled among his inky MSS. with illusion in his eyes.

Darkness was falling. The sun had left a red smudge in the West which lay behind the trunks of a group of pines like a dying fire behind bars. Mists were gathering about Brambletye and the chill of nightfall. Theodore shivered as the last gleam of light vanished from one of the cottage windows like a lamp suddenly put out. A moment later he heard footsteps in the wood and saw his brother. Guy came to the gate and stood silently beside him. Together they contemplated the dark outline of the cottage.

Theodore could not control a desire to look into his brother's mind.

"Tell me Guy," he said suddenly. "What brought you to Brambletye this evening?"

Guy looked at his brother.

"Aren't we," he said, "rather like the naughty sisters in the play? *Where did you lose this bodkin, sister? And where did you find this bodkin, sister, O sister all the time?* We are both at the World's End, if it comes to that?"

"Sometimes," he added, contemplating the cottage, "I feel that I am still living between the walls of that cottage, and I find my present life incredible. It seems too good to be true. Perhaps that is really what's wrong with it. Perhaps it isn't true."

They walked back to Old Place. On the terrace, Theodore, who had been reflecting on the way, suddenly gripped his brother's arm and brought him to a standstill.

"If you fail Marian in the least degree I will never forgive you."

"I should never forgive myself," said Guy.

CHAPTER VI

§ I

GUY and Marian prolonged their week-end at Old Place until the following Thursday, and Guy kept himself informed of his business affairs by telephone. On Wednesday his clerk rang him up and said there were a number of urgent but small matters requiring consideration. They could be dealt with in half an hour. Guy told him to send Miss Thorne down to Old Place by the next train with the necessary papers, and in the afternoon he waited for her in the library.

Christine had lately become the personal assistant of Guy, but, though they had been daily in close contact for several months, the acquaintance remained virtually where it had stood at their first interview.

Already she had appeared publicly with some success, and on the second occasion she had shared the programme with a pianist of distinction. It was felt thereafter incongruous that she should remain in the shop, and Guy had asked that she should be transferred to his department.

As she came forward into the library at Old Place, she stood a moment in the afternoon sun that lay across the floor. The rays which enlivened the sullen gold of her hair only emphasised the stillness

of her face. It seemed implacably shut upon a mystery.

§ 2

He opened the despatch case and dealt with the business it contained, asking Christine from time to time for the necessary particulars.

Imperceptibly during the last few months he had begun to be curious about her. He found himself putting side by side the few revealing things she had said, piecing together her preferences, feeling for the soul behind her seclusive eyes. But she remained mysterious. He knew only that she had no mother, that her father was a poor musician who made very little money, that she had a passion for books as well as for music, and instinctively liked the right ones.

"I'll ring for tea," said Guy, when they had finished. "There isn't a train till half-past five."

"Is the little boy here?" she asked suddenly.

"Raymond is in London."

"I should like to have seen him," said Christine

They turned at a sound. Marian stood on the threshold looking towards them. Christine rose from her chair.

"I'm not interrupting?" Marian asked.

"Not in the least," said Guy "We've finished our business."

Marian held out her hand to Christine, who took it with a perceptible hesitation.

Marian talked to put Christine at her ease; but Christine answered only with the briefest monosyllables. Her reticence was particularly marked when Marian expressed a hope that an invitation

to Ealing would be accepted. Christine said that Ealing, from where she lived, was difficult to reach.

In a few moments she rose to go. They had left barely sufficient time to catch the train, and at the door Guy, looking at his watch, said that, walking as she had come, by the road, she would probably miss it. He proposed to show her the short way through the wood to Brambletye.

§ 3

They reached Brambletye with nearly twenty minutes to spare. Christine, flushed with the exercise and breathing fast, paused with her hand on the cottage gate and looked back a moment at the deserted dwelling. Guy, already in the road, came back to the gate.

"An empty cottage," she remarked. "It looks as though it were haunted."

"I lived there for nearly two years," said Guy.

"By yourself?" she asked.

"Raymond was born there," said Guy.

"You left this place to go to Ealing?"

Her question sounded like an accusation. She was looking at the cottage. The sun slanted down from the edge of a brilliant cloud and blended her with it. For the moment she was radiant, and the cottage itself, with its dishevelled creepers putting forth new leaves to the spring, suddenly lived again.

"You like the country?" Guy asked, breaking the silence into which they had fallen.

"Here," said Christine, "it would be possible to escape."

She looked long at the cottage before turning away.

Guy accompanied her to the station, and stayed to bid her good-bye. He reminded her of Marian's renewed invitation to Ealing. Her face clouded.

"I don't belong there," she said abruptly.

Guy, on his way home, paused to look at Brambletye. Christine had been strangely attracted by the cottage. He remembered her as she had stood at the gate, lit by the sun, and recalled her answer to his renewed wish that she should come to Ealing. "I do not belong there," she had said. There, at last, was some of her mystery explained. She remained outside; and she had said of Brambletye that there it would be possible to "escape."

He turned from the gate and continued his walk along the road. Soon he came to a stile, and descended thence to a little valley over fields, fallow or green with the swift grass of spring. On the other side of the valley stood the church tower under which Sabina lay. He climbed the opposite hill, his mind full of the days at Brambletye.

He had left the grave in the care of the village sexton, who, finding that it was never visited, had grown careless. The roses swarmed upon it unpruned, and weeds were springing. The cross at the head of it was screened by a group of fox-gloves which had sown themselves there in the previous year.

Mechanically he began to uproot the weeds and to cut away the sprawling shoots of the roses. The fox-gloves he left untouched. When the work was done he stood awhile with his thoughts, and then

turned back towards Old Place. His hands were full of thorns from the roses.

Marian was coming down, dressed for dinner, when he arrived at Old Place. He stood at the foot of the staircase waiting for her to pass.

"Guy," she said, pausing as she came level with him, "you promised to take me for a walk."

He looked at her a moment with absent, clouded eyes, which suddenly brightened with contrition.

"So I did," he acknowledged.

Marian hesitated a moment.

"I don't think I like your Christine," she said at last. 'Still waters,' they say. I feel that in this case they are deep."

Guy was about to protest. He thought better of it and smiled.

"Finished?" he asked.

"That's all," said Marian. "A word in time saves nine."

"You're bursting with old saws to-night, Marian. And you're looking lovely," he added, kissing her cheek.

She saw that one of his hands was bleeding and exclaimed about it. He had left a small red smudge upon her arm.

"What on earth have you been doing to yourself?" she asked.

"No rose without a thorn," said Guy. "There's one of your old saws back again."

"Your hands are torn to pieces."

"Just a little amateur gardening," he said evasively.

He wiped the stain from her arm with his handkerchief and ran upstairs.

CHAPTER VII

§ 1

WHEN Guy and Marian returned to Ealing, they looked for the flat in town after which Guy increasingly seemed to aspire, and in a few days he announced that he had found it. It was a rambling suite of attics, lying amid the rafters of one of the theatres in Soho. He began to use it almost before Marian had remedied its deficiencies. He moved thither all his books and music, his favourite writing table and a piano.

He proposed to sleep there whenever there were late concerts. Marian consented to this arrangement with a growing dread of the change she had felt in him since the evening on which he had returned to Old Place with his hands full of thorns. It was a change so minute as to be hardly perceptible, a slight accentuation of the remoteness against which she had so often rebelled. It made her shy of claiming him in any way.

§ 2

Some three weeks after her visit to Old Place, Christine stayed at the office on Saturday afternoon to assist Guy in dealing with additional work.

He waited for her when the work was finished, watching her comb back the hair under her hat, and they went out together. He told her of his

brother's wedding, which was to take place early in the week. He was going to try the organ in a church not far away, where he had undertaken to officiate. It would be rather fun, except that the bride had chosen the programme, which was decorous in the extreme. He urged her to come with him to the church.

In ten minutes he was at the organ playing the programme which had been arranged. Christine watched him as he played, her elbows on the side of the organ. He finished the programme, and found among the music he had brought a score of "Tristan and Isolde." He began diffidently to transcribe and to improvise upon some of the themes. Discovering, as he proceeded, the resources of his instrument, he was soon letting heathendom loose among the aisles and arches. He was intensely conscious, as he played, of the brooding face of his companion.

He finished abruptly and pushed in the stops.

"That's music for a wedding," he said. "But it wouldn't be the marriage that's made in heaven."

"You play it well," said Christine.

The observations of Christine invariably had the effect of making any silence which might follow them almost oppressively significant.

§ 3

After he had seen Christine to an omnibus, he returned to the flat.

The clock on the mantel-piece chimed eight o'clock. He was due at Ealing for dinner. The ill-lighted room was already full of shadows. He

went to the telephone and called up his wife. He heard her voice, with the softness in it which she always had for him.

"Is that you, Guy?"

"Marian, I shan't be home this evening."

"It's the fourth time this week, Guy."

"I'm sorry, dear," was all he could say.

They exchanged good night, and he put up the receiver. He had heard the feeling in Marian's voice, and he had wounded it.

For a moment he almost changed his mind and decided to go to her. She would spend the evening reading and playing alone, nursing that hardly perceptible estrangement which he himself had lately felt in her.

But, when it came to the point, he was unable to move.

§ 4

Guy returned to Marian in time for lunch on the following day. She made no allusion to his telephone message, and received without comment his announcement that he would probably sleep at the flat during the week until Thursday, which was the day before Theodore's wedding.

In the afternoon he was summoned to view and to assess the musical library of a country house not far from Southgate. On these occasions he usually took Christine.

They motored out in the early afternoon. The house lay well beyond Southgate, in the unspoiled country on the Western borders of the wooded country near High Barnet. Guy sat well back in the open car, watching Christine as she turned from

right to left, missing no feature of the perfect day, open to the influences of air and sky, the shining trees, and the spray of the wild flowers in the hedges.

At six o'clock, when their work was done, they stood outside the house faced with the alternatives of walking back to Southgate or taking a bridle-path through the woods to High Barnet. They chose the bridle-path.

The path was wilder and less frequented than they had imagined from the map. They descended to a brook by a steep decline on which the roots of giant trees served often as a stairway.

Christine walked a little in front of him. Her still profile, the slow grace of her moving arms, and her dark tranquillity held him as by a spell. He could see her face taciturn as the blank sky and the sullen trees.

A train came down the cutting which lay across their upward path from the trough of the valley. When it had passed, the place seemed more than ever remote and wild. The train slipped away to its suburban station, a fugitive reference to the life he had been leading for the last few years, and left him there fatally alone with Christine.

Often in the course of their growing intimacy he had hoped that she might become less remote. The impulse to do something which might induce this event had never been so strong as during their walk down into the valley. He was flogged by a passionate curiosity in which there was an unconfessed desire of possession.

They climbed out of the valley. Christine, on

arriving at the summit, stood still in the path, which now ran across open grass, and looked silently at the country. It was as though she desired to refresh her eyes with light and colour, with the broad pastures and dim trees, sweeten her mind with the free air and deepen her thoughts with the nightfall. She stood as though dilated by these influences, comprehending and absorbing the beauty and power with which they were charged.

Some wild ponies loose on the common wandered up and inspected them cautiously, as though the animals had been struck by something hardly natural in their frozen attitudes.

From that moment of silence Guy was to date the years of his discretion. The impulse to break down, by some challenge abrupt and inescapable, the reserve which kept Christine inviolate suffered a sovereign prohibition. He rebuked it in the presence of that sybilline figure. She stood beyond the clutch of possession. To molest her under the influence of an emotion which had its sources in vanity and desire became for him in that moment an act of impossible levity. He was suddenly content to leave whatever there might have been intimately between them among the things unadmitted and unexpressed which live secretly in every heart.

Silently he renounced discovery of the girl beside him in the conviction that henceforth he would remain alone in conquest or defeat. For a moment he shrank from the bleak solitude of a life dedicated to an object not yet plainly declared. Then it

seemed as though a secret energy sprang alive in him to meet a destiny unknown and to keep him faithful to a purpose obscurely formed.

They started to walk on, as though without a word between them they had simultaneously decided to do so.

The ponies, which had stood motionless in a semi-circle watching them with necks pushed forward, flung up their heads and trotted away.

CHAPTER VIII

§ I

GUY, who was due that night at Ealing, went to the flat instead.

In the morning he woke to find the sun streaming into his room, and the telephone bell ringing close beside him. He picked up the receiver of the telephone.

"Is that you, Guy?" It was Marian's voice.

"Guy speaking," he announced.

"Have you everything you need for the wedding?"

"The wedding?"

"Of course. Had you forgotten?"

"Er—no. Of course not. I'm only just awake, as a matter of fact. I've arranged to be at the church before you all arrive: yes, to play the people in."

He dismissed his cab at the church door. For a moment he had thought of excusing himself from the office he had assumed. He did not feel equal to it. He had not eaten anything since the light tea he had taken with Christine in the library at Southgate. He pulled out his watch. It still wanted half an hour of the time fixed for the ceremony. He went into a public-house close at hand and hastily refreshed himself.

On his return to the church he was met by a

smiling verger, who inducted him into the organ loft. Under his eyes lay the music as he had left it on the night he had played to Christine. She had put her elbows on the organ so that his left hand, reaching suddenly at a low note, had seemed about to touch them.

There was a whispering and a rustling in the aisles. The guests were beginning to arrive. He prepared his music on the desk, and began to play. Soon, through the slanted mirror to his right, he saw Theodore come down the aisle with Powicke, who was his best man. Theodore looked the part of a happy and fashionable bridegroom. He was serious, but not solemn; obviously a master of himself and of his destiny. He talked now and then to Powicke in the manner of a general giving a few last instructions to an aide before the battle.

Guy became aware that somebody was trying to engage his attention. He had forgotten to look as instructed for the signal which should inform him from the porch that the bride had arrived, and that the moment had come to play the processional hymn. He modulated harshly from what he was playing into the necessary key, tripping into it rather like a man who stumbles through a door which suddenly gives way under a violent push.

The procession, which seemed very distant and unreal, was now moving down the aisle, led by the choir in white surplices. First came the shrill boys. Some day he would be an organist and train his boys to sing some of Bach's forgotten cantatas. Then the men came, for whom, as they advanced, he played a majestic passage in counter-

point on the pedals. In the mirror he saw Marian look up towards the loft with a slight movement of surprise. Powicke smiled, and whispered to Theodore, who stood waiting for his bride. Theodore also glanced up at the loft. He looked as though he were annoyed.

The service seemed interminable. Guy went mechanically through the programme, held between the mirage of decorous figures below and the reality of Christine as she had sat beside him within reach of his hand. Theodore was now repeating the responses, apparently quite unmoved by the awful gravity of his undertakings. His bride repeated them in the manner of one who would never be moved by anything. Guy wondered why he should take life so much to heart when there were so many people who could deal with it almost without any feeling at all. The formal world stood beneath him, quietly and ceremoniously disposing of its vital business, while he, who had somehow been put there to minister to its occasions, felt that forever he would be an exile.

The procession was moving again. It passed under his feet into the vestry. There was a hymn to be sung while the register was being signed. He began to play the hymn, and, in the middle of the first verse, saw Marian, who had not yet gone into the vestry, look up at him as on a previous occasion. Apparently he was playing the hymn too fast. In fact it seemed almost a cheerful hymn as he was playing it. Well, why not? Theodore was probably going to be very happy.

He remained inactive for a moment after the

hymn was finished. The Mendelssohn March lay uppermost on the desk, but that should not, of course, be played till the bride and bridegroom came from the vestry. But silence, against a background of rustling and whispering and the noise of human voices that rose from the vestry between his legs, was disconcerting. He heard Aunt Helen ask where she was to sign, and he saw Marian walk from the pew to join the autographers. He ought, perhaps, to play something.

His eye fell upon the score of "Tristan and Isolde," left there on the night he had played to Christine. He began preluding softly upon the principal themes.

He began to think of Christine as he played. He could see her now more plainly than the people in the mirror. He reached for some stops and started to develop the motives. Gradually he was absorbed into his playing.

Meanwhile the verger was making vain signals to inform him that the moment for Mendelssohn had at last arrived. But Guy was by this time too fully occupied with the organ to notice anything. For him it was now a world of stops and manuals.

The procession, when it emerged from the vestry, was met full blast. The aisles and pillars rocked with ecstasies which went but ill with the lilled stateliness of the bride; and Theodore, as he walked into matrimony with a sober brow, inwardly cowered under the fantasia. Matters were not mended by a sudden silence as the bride and bridegroom reached the church door, followed by a quaint plunge at Mendelssohn. Powicke said that

the Mendelssohn, following suddenly upon raptures clearly unauthorised, sounded for all the world as though a marriage had been arranged the morning after.

Mrs. Theodore Reval, turning to her husband in the car, said that she would never forgive her brother-in-law. She suspected a deliberate travesty.

Guy did not move from the loft till the church was empty and the verger's step was upon the stair. He realised his offence with a smile of bitter understanding. His life in the normal world had been always a tragi-comedy. There had never failed an element of the grotesque in the events which were gradually shaping his destiny.

§ 2

That night, at the flat in Soho, Guy, as he sat among the shadows, looked squarely at the implacable laws of life which required that the consequences of every act should be fulfilled. He saw his whole career—his helpless and incomplete life with Sabina, and the mistaken marriage with Marian—as a succession of blind errors.

Marian sat alone, aware of an estrangement she could not measure or define, waiting for him to reveal the failure of their marriage. He was convinced that they could never resume their effort to come together. Circumstances had revealed the necessary tragedy of their relationship, and Marian would read the tragedy line by line every day of her life so long as they remained together. With Marian must go the comedy he had played with

her for heroine. He had no right to his place in the ordinary life he had outraged. It carried responsibilities to which he had proved unequal, and decencies which he had flouted. The wraith of Sabina, which had always stood between them, now beckoned him back to Brambletye and to the purpose he had neglected.

His marriage with Marian had been always incomplete. There had been compromise and accommodation, at best it had been a charming comedy which often needed the affectionate and devoted efforts of both of them to sustain. It had left them with a sense of unreality and frustration which had gradually destroyed in them all real hope of perfection.

§ 3

He rose at last, and, getting a light, went to a neglected corner of the room where there was a large oak chest into which three years ago, he had thrown the papers which he had brought away from Brambletye. The MSS. he found were clammy between his fingers, and gave to his activities the character of an exhumation. He found at last the score of his "Forsaken Merman," which he had not touched since the afternoon he had played it to Marian at the cottage. He turned the pages with the curiosity of a man who discovers the different individual he was at a period grown remote. Gradually he felt his way back to that time, but he looked upon it now with understanding. He found in his music the emotion, eager and uncontrolled, which had driven him to the effort after expression, and he recovered that emotion as he read.

He felt it now, however, not as a raw experience, but as something that had passed into his character, something he could comprehend and shape and present in all its significance. He felt in himself the power to create from this material something in which he might perhaps be justified. He was directed to an end that lay somewhere beyond the broken and imperfect phrases of his manuscript, an end to which he must henceforth remain ascetically faithful, in failure or success. He began more clearly to realise all that was implied by his instinctive renunciation of Christine.

The morning light was shining upon the page when he had finished reading. He took a pen, and upon the half sheet of paper at the end of his manuscript he planned the work afresh.

§ 4

When he met Marian on the following day she was sitting in the drawing room dressed for dinner. They greeted as people who fence discreetly till the inevitable hour. Guy went upstairs and remained with Raymond till dinner was served. Raymond's welcome, so ingenuously unchanged by the collapse of all the old relationships, affected Guy profoundly. He sat with the boy on his knee, thinking that of all those who had mattered to him Raymond alone remained.

After dinner, which passed almost in silence, he sat with Marian in the drawing room postponing his explanation. Marian waited for him to say something about his studied avoidance. She dreaded to learn what was behind it.

He looked at her as she glanced through the evening papers, reading hardly a word. She threw them down at last. He knew she was about to speak, and that she made several efforts to begin. He admired the courage with which, splendidly casual, she at last opened with a question in which she disguised her anxiety with a wry smile.

"Why Tristan and Isolde?" she asked. "The bride was furious."

"I failed to remember my instructions," said Guy.

"Maliciously?" Marian asked.

"Absence of mind," said Guy.

Marian hesitated. Guy could almost feel how she took up her courage for the effort.

"And everything else," she said. "Is that also absence of mind?"

He rose and walked up and down the room a moment. Then he stopped beside her chair.

"Marian," he said, "I want you to let me go and live with Raymond at Brambletye."

Marian spoke with difficulty. She had not thought it was as bad as that.

"Alone?"

"With Raymond."

She ignored the main question, darting for relief to a side issue.

But your business, Guy," she objected. "Brambletye would be most inconvenient."

"I've decided to retire from the business."

The impalpable thing was now definite and declared. She had lost Guy. Or rather (she burned to think of it), she had never really possessed

him. She took the blow as one takes a thing suspected in advance.

"But why must you go back to Brambletye?" she urged. "You can live your own life here. Here or at Brambletye you can be equally yourself."

"Marian, dear, I implore you to let me go. Nothing else is possible. We are neither of us able to compromise."

There was a silence, broken at last by Marian. She searched for a missing link in the story.

"There is someone else?" she inquired.

She remembered an evening at Old Place when Guy had returned to her late, with his hands full of thorns. On that same afternoon he had walked with Christine to Brambletye.

"Oh Guy!" she cried suddenly, "not that girl I saw with you at Old Place?"

"I shall be alone at Brambletye," said Guy.

There was a silence, in which it seemed that the ghostly murmuring of a third presence was audible. Both were thinking of the dead wife who had lived where Guy would henceforth be alone.

"I think I understand," said Marian at last.

CHAPTER IX

§ I

DURING the days that followed Marian wondered what precisely people meant by a broken heart? Her own symptoms were not outwardly alarming. She still went about her work. She did not show grief in any noticeable way. She had simply mislaid her emotions. It was as though the blow had numbed that part of her consciousness where it fell.

Ostensibly Guy had simply retired into the country to take up his interrupted career as author and musician.

Marian neither agreed nor disagreed with the arrangements made by Guy for her material comfort and security. She imagined she would at some time or other have to consider these questions. Meanwhile she waited for this anæsthesia to pass.

Guy's first visit to Brambletye was one of inspection only. He arrived in the early afternoon and let himself into the empty cottage. He had not entered it since the autumn morning three years ago when he had left it with Raymond. It had been periodically overlooked by the wood-cutter's wife, but from long disuse it was airless and dead. He stood motionless in the room below, submitting to the influence of the place. There was hardly an object there which did not start a

memory. The interlude of his life with Marian was almost forgotten. He could hear and see, he could almost touch, the wife who had died. He went upstairs, and memory was further quickened to reprove the falsehood of his second courtship and marriage. At last the silence which hung in the stagnant air became intolerable. He walked to the window and threw it open. The dead atmosphere of the room stirred, and cheerful summer noises floated in. The cold past into which he had walked was warmed with present life, and, from dwelling upon what had been, he began to think of the life he would live henceforth.

He looked soberly at the facts, and faced the future in no forced attitude either of rebellion or humiliation. He had killed Sabina and deserted Marian. He could not undo the past, but he would henceforth test every act of his life with the acid of those bitter memories.

For a livelihood he would re-enter the world upon his own terms without prejudice to the work he desired to do. In abandoning the profitable activities in which he had recently been engaged, he was moved by no insolence or contempt. But he knew that such activities were for him a negation of everything to which he was bound to aspire; that for him they were the bread on which no man might live alone.

In this renunciation Marian was fatally included. Neither for him nor for her was it possible to compromise with perfection. For Guy such a compromise would mean a complete frustration of the impulse which had brought him back to Brambletye.

For Marian compromise might seem possible for the moment, but that was only because she was still in the mood when to suffer seems better than the peace which puts an end to the story.

§ 2

It was in such a mood that Marian made her only effort to induce Guy to return. Its weakness was indicated by the fact that it was made by messenger.

About a fortnight after Guy had definitely settled at Brambletye, he was writing in the sitting room of the cottage, when he heard a footstep on the flags outside. He rose, and was about to see who was his visitor, when Theodore appeared at the doorway. There was no greeting between them. They stood for a moment silently looking at one another. It was Guy who spoke first, and he went straight to the point.

"You have come from Marian," he said.

Theodore turned upon Guy in anger, which was like an East wind.

"I come from Marian," he replied. "She asks you to come back. Why have you committed this damnable cruelty?"

Guy looked at him a moment.

"It's useless, Theodore," he said.

"You act as though life were a schoolboy's slate. You can't rub out and begin again whenever you make a mistake."

"Neither Marian nor I can compromise."

Theodore stifled his anger to plead.

"Guy," he said, "you have caused Marian the

most bitter suffering. She asks you to come back. She sends me here to do what I can."

"You have done what you can. If I were going to return I should have yielded to the look on your face when you came in. My life, beyond change or remedy, is here."

He indicated the table where lay the manuscript on which he had been working when his brother entered.

"But why should Marian be excluded?"

"The thing is beyond us. It just happens to be so."

"If you persist, Guy, this is probably the last time we shall meet. I have loved Marian all my life."

Guy put a hand on his brother's arm.

"It would only be adding another blunder to the tale if I did what you suggest."

Theodore, without addressing another word to his brother, turned and left the cottage. Indignation contended in his mind with perplexity and with a sense of fatality which ended by dominating his anger. He walked fast and far before he had time to clarify his impressions.

His brother stood convicted past forgiveness of an outlandish levity which had spoiled Marian's life. He had lived carelessly upon the edge of tragedy. Yet, through all his bitter indignation, Theodore was aware at last of a novel steadiness and sense of responsibility in his brother. He had missed the old wilfulness, defying destiny with blind eyes. He felt that his brother had come to a firm resolution with a clear view of the consequences. Guy had met him candidly and seriously,

like a man who had faced every possibility of the situation.

He wondered what his brother would make of the new life. Was Guy to be permitted to find peace as a postscript to two tragedies?

§ 3

Theodore had left the cottage by the front gate, and he was already far upon his way before he realised that he was taking the longer route to the station by way of the road. On arriving at the station he found that he had just missed a train to London, and that there was not another train for over an hour. It was already half-past six, and he would now be late for dinner. He ordered tea at the local inn, and, after taking it, strolled back to the station by a path which ran through the churchyard. He had last stood in that churchyard when Sabina was buried; and, moved by a sudden impulse, he walked to the corner where she lay.

The sun had by now set behind the Church, which cast a deep shadow over the place. He noticed that the grave had been recently tidied. Some shoots pruned from the roses lay still green in a heap beside it, and the soil between the plants had been freshly stirred. This must have been his brother's work.

Then suddenly he heard someone approaching. He retired into the shadow of the church wall. A figure difficult to distinguish, but in which almost immediately he recognised his brother, came directly towards the grave, and stood motionless beside it.

From where Theodore remained in the shadow every movement of the figure was plain. He saw it bend low over the grave for a moment. It straightened itself and looked at something taken into its hand.

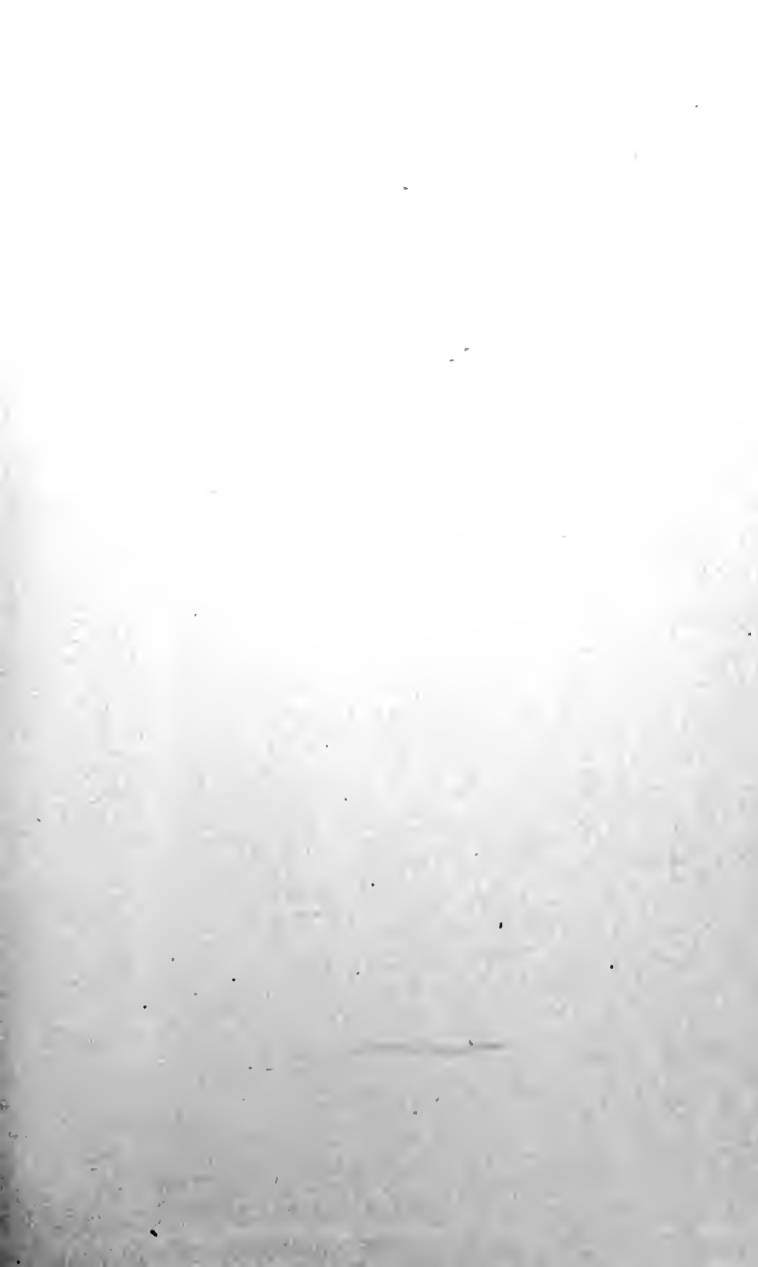
It came towards the spot where Theodore stood beside the wall and passed without perceiving him.

Theodore saw that his brother had gathered a rose from the grave of Sabina. He waited for Guy to pass out of sight, and then resumed his walk to the station. The conflicting feelings of the afternoon had given place to another sentiment. He was envying his brother the rose.

* * * * *

A few hours later Guy Reval, sitting alone before the table in his cottage, wrote the concluding bars of "The Forsaken Merman." And he knew that his work was good.





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